

**Palestinian filmmaking in Israel :
negotiating conflicting discourses**

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Palestinian Filmmaking in Israel: Negotiating Conflicting Discourses

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Abstract

In recent years Palestinian cinema is evidently growing, as more films emerge from diverse sites of production: the Palestinian Authority, the different Palestinian diasporas and inside Israel. While scholars have often discussed Palestinian cinema without necessarily differentiating between the various sites of production, this thesis offers an in-depth analysis of Palestinian filmmaking inside Israel by Palestinians citizens of Israel.

It addresses a lacuna in the research of Palestinian cinema by examining in detail the context of production of Palestinian films within the Israeli film industry, outlining the structural conditions and the discursive environment within which Palestinian filmmakers in Israel work. Moreover, through a close reading of key films, and references to others, this thesis identifies shared thematic characteristics of this body of work, and discusses the ways in which the films relate to both the Zionist and the Palestinian national discourses.

Broadly, my analysis shows that while as with Palestinian cinema at large the films discussed in this thesis engage with issues of history, space and resistance they are nuanced in ways which relate to the specific circumstances of Palestinians in Israel. Concerns of 'belonging' and identity consume much of the films' production and distribution processes as well as their thematic focus. Their production within Israel problematises the categories of both Israeli and Palestinian cinemas as 'national' cinemas, since their hybridity on the one hand exposes the ambivalence of the Zionist discourse and disturbs notions of Palestinian national resistance on the other. Thematically, many of the films' narratives, especially of the younger generation, feature processes of 'becoming', as the films' subjects search for places of belonging and identity positions. In so doing, the films often functioned as 'sites' through which conflicting discourses of identity, culture and politics were negotiated. In the films, and through the process of making the films, the filmmakers examined, scrutinized and often positioned themselves in relation to dominant Palestinian and Israeli/Zionist discourses, within the wider cultural trajectories of East and West.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
 Chapter 1	
The Palestinian Citizens of Israel: Historical and Theoretical Contexts	20
The Zionist Discourse of Euro-modernity and its ambivalence	
The Political map of Palestinian Citizens of Israel	
Hybridity and young Palestinians in Israel	
Conclusion	
 Chapter 2	
Context of Production: The Israeli Industry	44
Palestinian films in Israel: 1948-1990s.	
Early Beginnings: the 1980s	
Michel Khliefi	
Al Jadid	
Palestinian films in Israel since the 1990s	
The Israeli Film Industry	
The Television Industry	
A Note on Censorship	
Diversity in Practice: the limits of the discourse	
Conclusion	
 Chapter 3	
Context of Production: Palestinian filmmakers in Israel	77
NGOs and Film Schools	
Strategies of Production of Individual Filmmakers	
Working outside/ Working inside	
The Israeli Industry and the limits of the discourse	
The importance of locality: working in one's homeland	
Beyond the national conflict	
Conclusion	
 Chapter 4	
History, Memory, Identity	103
Counter Narratives: The <i>Nakba</i> in the films of 'second generation' Palestinians in Israel	
Private Investigations: national identity and young Palestinian filmmakers	
Conclusion	

Chapter 5	
Marginality, Liminality and the Arab Town in Israel	149
‘In-between’: Liminality and third spaces	
The Arab Town: images of dysfunction	
Absence and stagnation	
Chaos and fragmentation	
Conclusion	
 Chapter 6	
Crossing the Green Line: Palestinian-Israeli filmmakers and the <i>Intifada</i>	191
Visible Evidence: Representing ‘the Battle of Jenin’	
Transcending actuality: the Jenin films as ‘works of mourning’	
Popular resistance and national heroes	
Conclusion	
 Conclusion	219
 Bibliography	226
 Filmography	246
 Appendix 1 List of Interviews	247

Introduction

Palestinian cinema is generally understood to be a project of counter-representation. Set against the backdrop of Israeli colonialism, as well as misrepresentation in the world's media, it provides, as Edward Said (2006) put it, "a visual alternative, a visual articulation, a visual incarnation of Palestinian existence in the years since 1948" (3). While emerging from the margins, modest in its output and facing many obstacles, Palestinian cinema is growing steadily. In recent years, more and more films are being produced by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, by Palestinian citizens of Israel and by Palestinians in the different Palestinian diasporas. Opportunities for exhibition and distribution of Palestinian films are also expanding: more Palestinian film festivals are being organised around the world, efforts are being made to create outlets for exhibition in the Palestinian Authority (PA) and in Israel, the internet is increasingly being utilised as a platform for exhibition and debate, and recent Palestinian films have been showcased in mainstream festivals and gained cinematic general release in the West. With this proliferation, new avenues for research and analysis are opening up, as demonstrated by the growing number of academic publications about Palestinian cinema. This thesis seeks to contribute to this ongoing research into Palestinian cinema by providing a focused analysis of an area that has been comparatively neglected to date, filmmaking by Palestinians citizens of Israel, inside Israel, in recent years.

Before the parameters of this thesis can be more rigorously defined, some background on the complex development of Palestinian cinema is needed. Historically, nascent Palestinian cinema was already emerging in Palestine under the British Mandate, when several pioneering filmmakers began producing films (Khleifi, 2001; Gertz and Khleifi, 2008; Hennebelle, 1979; Downing, 1979). Compared to the emerging Zionist cinema and the amount of foreign filmmakers that Palestine attracted, the Palestinians' interest in cinema was relatively limited and production was sporadic (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008; Khleifi, 2001; Downing, 1979; Freedman, 1948). While some of the Palestinian filmmakers exhibited a nationalist consciousness, seeking to develop a distinct Palestinian cinema

as a reaction against Zionism (Hennebelle, 1979; Khleifi, 2001), there were also collaborations between Jewish and Arab filmmakers around that time (Shohat, 1989a). The 1948 war brought an abrupt end to these early beginnings. Between 1948 and 1967 there is no evidence of Palestinian film production within the state of Israel or in exile (Khleifi, 2001). During this 'silent period', as George Khleifi refers to it, inside and outside of Israel Palestinians were mainly engaged with basic economic and social survival. Under the Military Government inside Israel, or in the refugee camps in exile, there was simply no infrastructure, funding or equipment to make films. Cinematic engagement with the new political situation of the Palestinians had shifted from Palestine to other Arab countries. While these films were important in raising the issue of the Palestinian *Nakba*, they were severely criticized by those who were committed to the Palestinian national cause, and by the next generation of Palestinian filmmakers, for not engaging with a political analysis of the defeat and the role of the Arab regimes within it (Hennebelle, 1979; Shafik, 2001).¹

The revival of Palestinian cinema came about in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat (the *Naksa*) within the circles of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). A new generation of filmmakers (Palestinians and non-Palestinians), who were committed to the Palestinian national struggle, started to work under the auspices of the various revolutionary movements (Hennebelle, 1979; Shafik, 2001; Khleifi, 2001; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008).² The first to establish a film unit was *Fatah* in 1968, the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) and the DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) followed and in 1972 the cultural section of the PLO established its own film unit (Hennebelle, 1979; Shafik, 2001).

In 1973 a Palestinian Cinema Group was initiated by the filmmaker Mustafa Abu-Ali in

¹According to Shafik, The first example was the Egyptian fiction film *A Girl from Palestine*, which was made by Mahmoud Zul-Fiqar in 1948. Significantly, this film also marks the first instance of Egyptian cinema in which national and anti-colonial agendas are dealt with, which until then was largely avoiding national issues (2001). During the 1960s there was an increase in the production of Arab films that deal with the Palestinian question; about a hundred documentaries and fiction films tackled the issue, exemplifying, according to Shafik, "the prevalent ... atmosphere of pan-Arab solidarity" (2001: 518).

²Committed Iraqis, Lebanese, Syrians and Egyptians filmmakers were also working within the organisations' film units.

Lebanon, who attempted to bring together the different filmmakers under one roof. The group published a manifesto, which, aiming to “put the entire cinema at the service of the Palestinian revolution and the Arab cause”,³ defined the primary objectives of the group as: commitment to self-representation, archiving of film materials that document the life and struggle of Palestinians, development of new and appropriate aesthetics and establishing links with other revolutionary, anti-colonial and progressive film groups.⁴ Despite the ambitious aims expressed in the manifesto, the Palestinian Cinema Group was short-lived and filmmakers continued to work in separation within the various film units.⁵ In 1982, when Israeli forces invaded Beirut, the PLO headquarters were destroyed and its leadership was forced out of Lebanon. The PLO relocated (again) to Tunis but the film archive was lost, either destroyed in battle or confiscated by the Israeli Army.⁶ While the film units continued to work in Tunis, the 1980s saw a sharp decline in their production and only about ten or twelve more films were produced. This, according to Shafik (2001), is “not least because [the PLO] decided to support sympathetic Western productions, recognizing the benefits of positive Western presentations of the Palestinian cause” (520).

Of the fifty to sixty films that the PLO film units produced, the vast majority were documentaries and newsreels, but a number of low-budget fiction films were also made. Most of the films revolved around the theme of liberation through armed struggle, documenting the struggle in the refugee camps and several of the PLO’s military actions. Several scholars of Palestinian cinema have pointed out the limitations of the PLO films, either in relation to their poor quality or to their militant aesthetic and mode of production (Shafik, 2001; Khleifi 2001; Hennebelle 1979). According to George Khleifi (2001):

³ Quoted from The Palestinian Cinema Group manifesto as it was published in Mar’a (1979).

⁴ The Palestinian Film Group was part of an emerging New Arab Cinema. The group defined its novelty against the backdrop of Arab cinemas. Claiming to be the Avant-Garde of Arab cinema, the manifesto proclaimed that the emerging “young talent” make films that “raise questions about the defeat and take courageous stands in favour of the resistance”. For further discussion on the effects of the 1967 war on the emergence of New Arab Cinema see: Shafik, 2006.

⁵ According to Hennebelle, about 15 filmmakers worked within the PLO film units during the 1970s (1979: 34).

⁶ According to some versions the films are held by the Israeli Army authorities. For details see Khleifi, 2001.

[Although] the filmmakers of the third period indeed accompanied the fighters and documented the everyday life in the refugee camps, and have risked their lives doing so..., they did not manage to create a cinema that would transcend the official militant approach of the political movements. Most of the films that were produced were based on the assumption that since the Palestinian cause is just, it would eventually win the battle. They did not document the lives of flesh-and-blood people, whose life moved between feelings of hope and despair (182).⁷

Most accounts of the evolution of Palestinian cinema identify a significant shift in the dominant mode of representation and production since the mid-1980s (Shafik, 2001; Khleifi, 2001; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008; Alexander 2005; Dabashi, 2006; Massad, 2006). This shift, which was anticipated by the early films of the Israeli-born filmmaker Michel Khleifi, was characterized by the decline of the revolutionary films and an emergence of more individualistic, innovative and diverse New Palestinian Cinema (as it is often termed by academics and critics).⁸

The context of production of the New Palestinian cinema shifted from under the auspices of the PLO to multiple contexts. Informed by the political changes of the past decades – the two Intifadas, the establishment of PA, the Oslo accords and their apparent failure, and the recent rift between the PA in the West Bank and the Hamas-led government of the Gaza strip - the development of New Palestinian cinema has been largely prompted by filmmakers who work individually in different sites of production. Filmmakers work in Europe, the USA, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza and in other Arab countries. While some work primarily in one of these sites, these different sites of production are not necessarily separate. In recent years, some filmmakers have moved from Israel and the PA to the West, and from exile (in the West or elsewhere) to the PA, and some filmmakers work in-between the different sites of production.

⁷ Both Khleifi and Shafik mention a number of films that offer a more cinematic and poetic representation of Palestinians. Some of these are *The Key* (Galeb Saath, 1976), *We Don't Exist Palestine Chronicle of a People* and *Sirhan and the Hose* (The Palestine Film Unit, 1973) which is based on a poem by Tawfik Ziad (Khleifi, 2001:182; Shafik, 2001).

⁸ Other terms are also used by scholars, Shafik referred to these films as “post- revolutionary” cinema (2001), Khleifi (2001), and later Gertz and Khleifi (2006, 2008) refer to them as films that mark the “the fourth period” in their chronology of Palestinian cinema.

New Palestinian cinema has developed a wider range of themes, styles and modes of address. According to Shafik (2001), while the 'revolutionary films' were modernist and Third Worldist, the 'post-revolutionary' cinema tends to be more personal, and undertake "pragmatic self-criticism" (522). Massad (2006) noted that "while many of the recent films are still involved in documenting Palestinian lives, their role is less pedagogical and aims less at an incitement to politics than at a commentary at it... constitutive of the simultaneous despair and hope that Palestinian people are experiencing" (38).

Emerging from different sites of production, as Gertz and Khleifi (2008) argue, the individualistic nature of the films of New Palestinian Cinema... "is directly influenced by the experiences that shaped each filmmaker's childhood, by the director's personal confrontations with the various Israeli governmental institutions, and by his or her desperate attempt to create films against all odds" (37). Palestinian films that are made in the PA tend to focus on the depiction of everyday life under the occupation, responding, in recent years, to, as Massad (2006) puts it, the "experimental nature of the new modality of the Israeli occupation under PA rule" (38). As the scholarly analysis of these films has shown, often they are confined, due to the political situation, to the directors' immediate surroundings and to contemporary political circumstances; they depict, with great imagination, the everyday life of ordinary people under the effects of siege and curfew, the Wall, roadblocks and checkpoints (Gertz, 2004; Gertz and Khleifi 2006, 2008; Dickinson, 2005, 2010). Many films that were produced within the PA, as Dickinson (2005) noted, share an aesthetic of direct documentary, and focus on "the revelation of chilling violation of human dignity and safety" (266).⁹

If films which were made in the PA often depicted life under Israeli occupation, filmmakers in the Palestinian diasporas often focus on the experience of life within their

⁹ Dickinson referred specifically to the Palestinian films that were showcased in the Ramallah International Film Festival in 2004. Other examples include the films of the Gaza-born Rashid Mashrawi, one of the more prominent Palestinian filmmakers, which depicted life in the refugee camps in Gaza. For an elaborated analysis of Mashrawi's films see Gertz, 2004 and Gertz and Khleifi 2006, 2008. For analysis of the many recent films that are constructed around roadblocks and checkpoints see: chapter 6 in Gertz and Khleifi, 2008; Dickinson, 2010.

host Western societies, engaging with issues of Western representation of Palestinians, of bridging time and space gaps, of negotiating cultural differences and, increasingly since 9/11, with exploration of hyphenated identities in the USA.¹⁰ Palestinian filmmakers in the different diasporas often address cases of injunctions against or prohibitions on entering or communicating with the homeland across time and space, creating mental borders that need to be crossed (Naficy, 1995; 2001; 2006; Brumm, 1996).¹¹ Palestinian filmmakers who work in Israel, as this thesis will discuss in detail, tend to focus on the life of Palestinians inside Israel. Yet, it is important to note that while the films' themes are often related to the director's personal experiences and to his or her primary context of production, films are not always confined to it. Palestinian filmmakers from the diasporas have also made films about the PA, as did Palestinians from Israel, and some films interrogate the different experiences of living in diasporas, the PA or Israel.

Funding and distribution of New Palestinian cinema is equally diverse and largely transnational. In the West Bank and Gaza, initially, the increasing presence of international media, since the outbreak of the first *Intifada*, prompted the emergence of Palestinian filmmaking by providing access to funding, equipment and training for Palestinians. As Daud Kuttub (1993) explains "as conditions became more dangerous for foreign journalists they became more dependent on the local population for escort and guidance – and started to demand Palestinian fixers. Gradually individual Palestinians were thinking about producing themselves" (139). According to Alexander (2005), Palestinian media personnel eventually became the backbone of foreign news coverage in the area, and newly-formed Palestinian media companies were often established in collaboration with American or European media companies. While this has paved the way for the development of cinema in the PA, a viable national film

¹⁰ For example: Zeina Durra's *The Seventh Dog* (2005), a short black comedy about Palestinian couple entangled in a series of encounters with the FBI and Cherien Dabis *Amreeka* (2009), about a Palestinian single mother who immigrates to the US. Filmmakers explore similar issues in Europe, for example, Moahmoud Al Massad *Shatter Hassan* (2001), investigates his own identity attempting to come to terms with a sense of belonging nowhere.

¹¹ Naficy discusses the films Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988), *Wildflower: Women of South Lebanon* by Mai Masari, the early film of Elia Suleiman *Homage By Assassination* (1991). Brumm discusses a less known film *Foreign Nights* (1989) by the Canadian-Palestinian Izidore K. Musallem, as well as the way Palestinian labour migrants are featured in Mashrawi's early films.

industry is yet to be established. While local television in the West Bank and the PA government have occasionally supported various cinema projects, the reality of the ongoing conflict means that much of Palestinian cinema in the PA still relies on Western funding sources, often by the NGOs and charities which were set up in the region after the establishment of the PA (Alexander, 2005; Gertz and Khleifi, 2008; Dickinson, 2005). Filmmakers had frequently had to rely on Israeli funds, crews and cinema infrastructure, but recently most Palestinian filmmakers in the PA have boycotted any links with Israel (Dickinson, 2010) and generally there is a tendency to favour separation from Israel, as part of an anti-colonial struggle for cultural autonomy (Dickinson, 2005: 269). Palestinian filmmakers in exile usually produce their films within Western film industries and are usually funded by various European and American sources, although there are increasingly links with the PA. Filmmakers who are citizens of Israel, as this thesis will discuss in detail, sometimes work within the Israeli industry and sometimes in between Israel, the PA and the West.

The primary exhibition and distribution market for Palestinian films, emerging from all sites of production, is the international independent and festival circuits, rather than domestic audiences in the PA or within Israel.¹² In the absence of a proper cinema infrastructure, audiences in the PA and Israel are largely unexposed to Palestinian films. In the PA the number of commercial cinema halls is minimal, and several ventures to reopen cinemas, to hold film festivals and to have ad-hoc screenings (for example by mobile cinemas) have faced many obstacles (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008; Alexander, 2005; Dickinson, 2005).¹³ Inside Israel, as I will discuss later in the thesis, a similar state of affairs exists, albeit under different circumstances.

¹² Palestinian films are often screened at special screenings and political events that are organised at academic institutions or by NGOs, charities and grassroots political activists. They are featured at designated festivals such as the Human Rights Festival, at Arab film festivals or as special programmes of independent and art cinema houses like the ICA and NFT in London. Alongside one-off festivals dedicated to Palestinian films around the world, a number of annual Palestinian film festivals have been launched in North America and Europe such as the Canada Palestine Film Festival; Dream of a Nation, which is organised at Colombia University in New York; The Chicago Palestinian Film Festival and the London Palestinian Film Festival. Films are also occasionally broadcast on Western or global networks, including the global Arab networks such as Al Jazeera.

¹³ See Dickinson's report on the International Ramallah Film Festival for a detailed discussion of initiatives to revive film culture in the PA (2005); On the motivations and challenges of the Dream of a Nation festival in New York see Annemarie Jacir in Dabashi (2006), 23-31.

The early Palestinian films produced by the PLO film units fit easily into models of Third Cinema, as it was theorized by Teshome Gabriel (1979). Their collective mode of production, their articulation of film as a *weapon*, their focus on documentary and the new Guerrilla aesthetic and, finally, the links they forged with other contemporaneous revolutionary and progressive film movements, all resonate with Gabriel's typology.

New Palestinian cinema, as a number of scholars have noted, introduces new theoretical dilemmas (Dabashi, 2006; Alexander, 2005; Dickinson, 2005). On the one hand, what binds Palestinian films together is the general thematic focus on the political desire for a Palestinian nation state (Alexander, 2005: 151); viewed together Palestinian films provide an alternative space, in the absence of a nation state, in which to construct and articulate the Palestinian collective (Said, 2006; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008). Yet, models of national cinema, which focused on films that are produced within the boundaries of a nation state, as Alexander (2005) argues, do not easily fit the contemporary shifting and diverse context of production of Palestinian films. Scholars of Palestinian Cinema, according to Alexander, "lack the starting point of spatial and temporal continuity and context from which to discuss and analyze Palestinian films" (151).¹⁴

Much of the analysis of New Palestinian films to date discusses the manner in which the Palestinian historical narrative and a collective national identity are constructed *in* and *by* the films (Gertz and Khleifi's 2004, 2006, 2008; Gertz, 2001, 2002, 2004; Bersheeth, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2007; Alexander, 2005; Ball, 2008; Asfour, 2009; Salti, 2010). At the same time, New Palestinian Cinema is often placed by scholars within the theoretical context of "accented" or "exilic" cinema (Naficy, 2001, 2006; Bresheeth, 2002b; Saloul, 2007) "postcolonial cinema" (Bresheeth, 2001; Ball, 2008), "transnational cinema" (Alexander, 2005) and "post third-worldist cinema" (Shohat,

¹⁴ The concept of national cinema is problematic not only in its application to the case of Palestinian cinema. Its popular and scholarly use in relation to various clusters of films and/or different industrial contexts has been examined critically by a number of academic studies. For a recent publication which address this questions see: Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (2006).

2006), in which explorations of identity under conditions of displacement and exile tend to destabilize notions of national unity, and emphasize hybridities of cultures and identities.¹⁵ For example, according to Naficy (Ibid.), Palestinian cinema is structurally exilic, “as it is made either in the condition of internal exile in an occupied Palestine or under the erasure and tensions of displacement and external exile in other countries” (91), and the specific Palestinian filmmakers that Naficy addressed are categorized as “postmodern exilic filmmakers” which are “more prone to tensions and hesitations of exile, diaspora and transnationalism and their films...encode these tensions” (94). Gertz and Khleifi (2008) argue that while Palestinian filmmakers that lived and created in different cultures tended to construct “third spaces”, in which different cultures, positions and identities coexist, many new Palestinian filmmakers, in the face of the escalation of the conflict since the outbreak of the *Al Aksa Intifada*, and a sense that the Palestinian national identity is under threat, have tended to construct a unified Palestinian identity, at the expense of other identities of locality, region, class or gender (5).¹⁶ Alexander (2005) makes a similar claim, and points out theoretical models of exilic cinema, which were written with exilic communities in the West in mind, are limited when applied to the Palestinian case. Since the Palestinian colonial reality exists in a largely postcolonial world, as Alexander reminds us, “hyphenated Palestinians are perhaps more preoccupied with their homeland than other hyphenated people” (154). Many Palestinian filmmakers who are based in the West share the aesthetic sensibilities of contemporary art house films but thematically issues of the national continue to dominate their films (Ibid.). Ultimately, as Alexander argues, the Palestinian national struggle, on the one hand, and experiences of exile and displacement, on the other, place any discussion of Palestinian cinema between two existing bodies of literature: that of national cinema...and that of exilic, or transnational, cinema that operates beyond national boundaries (153), making it a “hybrid cinema that offers a complex relationship between the two” (157).

¹⁵ Saloul places his discussion within theories of narrativity rather than genre, and refers to a concept of “exilic narrativity”. His analysis focuses on *The Dupes* (Tawfik Saleh, 1972).

¹⁶ Gertz and Khleifi refer primarily to the films of Michel Khleifi but have also referenced the films of Palestinian Israeli citizens Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Assad, Ali Nassar and Nizar Hassan in this context (2008). I also refer to this claim in chapter four.

Drawing on this scholarly body of work on Palestinian cinema, my research starts from the proposition that, with the proliferation and diversity of New Palestinian cinema, there is something to be gained, theoretically, from a more nuanced analysis that would focus on the rather neglected 'site' of Palestinian film production inside Israel. In their writing about the contexts of production of Palestinian cinema some scholars have occasionally noted that specific films were funded by Israeli sources, or were produced within Israel. However, these notations were often made within a more general explanation of the diversity of the Palestinian production context and have not stretched further to a more critical consideration of the production of films within Israel.

In earlier studies of Palestinian cinema the context of production and distribution within Israel has been often overlooked. For example, both Shafik (2001) and Khleifi (2001) referred in their chronologies of Palestinian cinema to the context of production of the PLO films, as well as of those produced in the West, but overlooked the context of production when discussing films that were produced inside Israel (primarily the films of Nizar Hassan).¹⁷ When more recent studies of Palestinian cinema have commented on the context of production inside Israel, this has been primarily in relation to the political tensions that arise from accepting Israeli funding. For example, in their recent book about Palestinian cinema Gertz and Khleifi (2006; 2008) mention briefly that some filmmakers were trained in Israel and some films were assisted by Israeli funds, and note that these filmmakers were "severely criticized for it in Arab countries" (2008: 34). As part of her wider discussion of the transnational nature of Palestinian film production, Alexander (2005) references aspects of training, cinema exhibition and reception inside Israel, as well as funding by Israeli bodies, and notes that when

¹⁷ Viola Shafik includes in her discussion of the revolutionary films consideration of the context of production in order to explain their militant tone, their aesthetic style and their production values. However, when moving to discuss the films of Nizar Hassan, one of the prominent Palestinian-Israeli filmmakers, as part of a 'post revolutionary' Palestinian cinema, Shafik overlooks the context of production of his films, which were produced in Israel and supported by Israeli film funds. Similarly, in his article about the chronicle of Palestinian cinema (2001), Khleifi briefly discusses the context of production of Palestinian films in the forth period, mentioning the reliance on Western funding, the lack of national infrastructure in the PA and the role it takes in funding films in the PA, but overlooks the context of production inside Israel of other films of that period.

Palestinian citizens of Israel make films with Israeli funds, their reliance on such funds limits the extent to which they can criticize Zionism (156-7). Yet, the scope of Alexander's article did not allow for a more critical examination of the dynamics operating when Palestinian films are produced within Israel. Furthermore, Alexander's research concentrates on the period of the first Intifada and the Oslo Accords that followed (roughly until mid- 1990s), as a result of which more recent cases are not addressed in her article.

The context of production aside, scholarly writing about Palestinian cinema has thus far addressed, at different levels of analysis, the more prominent (and older) Palestinian filmmakers that are citizens of Israel (some of whom are also exilic, as they are based in the West). The films of Michel Khleifi, Ali Nassar, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Asad and Nizar Hassan have had much analytical attention (Gertz, 2001, 2002; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008; Shohat, 1989a, 2006; Yacub, 2007; Shafik, 2001; Asfour, 2009; Salti, 2010; Khatib, 2006; Bersheeth, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2007, 2007; Ball, 2008; Naaman, 2001; Dickinson, 2010). The work of less prominent, or younger, filmmakers who are citizens of Israel, such as Mohammad Bakri or Tawfik Abu-Wael, has also been addressed by some academic studies (Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008; Bersheeth, 2006, 2002a, 2007; Alon-Olienik, 2007; Chacham, 2007). Some of this analysis engages in detail with the films' treatment of the *specific* experience of Palestinian citizens of Israel, yet often within the context of Palestinian cinema at large and in relation to the Palestinian national struggle. While this focus, of course, emerges from the centrality of 'the national' to these films, this focus sometimes clouds wider aspects of Israeli colonialism which are cultural and not merely national, and which affect primarily the Palestinian citizens of Israel. For beyond the issue of the national struggle for independence, the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity is revealed in all its ambivalence in the relationship between the state of Israel and its Palestinian citizens. Everyday life of Palestinians in Israel is affected not only by their displacement, dispossession and demarcation as national 'Others' by Zionism, but also by (and sometimes more so) their demarcation as cultural 'Others' (Arabs) by Orientalist and neo-Orientalist Israeli discourses. Within that, issues of cultural superiority, of 'whiteness' and of modernity play as important a

part in the 'negotiations' of Palestinian citizens with the Zionist discourse and the Israeli state, as that of nationalism and the struggle for national independence.

When I embarked on this research in 2004, there was already some evidence to suggest that there is a growing interest in film production amongst young Palestinians in Israel, and that scholars are not addressing some of those films. Since then, a few more films have been completed and production still takes place (despite the escalation of the conflict, setbacks and obstacles), yet these, to the best of my knowledge, have still not gained enough analytical attention. A primary example is Ibtisam Mara'ana, a young and prolific filmmaker who has made six documentaries in Israel since 2002, and whose films have received little critical recognition, perhaps since her films, which focus primarily on gender relations, do not lend themselves easily to an interpretation of national resistance. The recent films of other young and emerging filmmakers from Israel, such as Suha Arraf, Bilal Yousef, Ula Tabari, Shady Srur, Rokaya Sabbah, Anan Barakat, Kamal Aljafari, Basel Tannous, Scandar Copti, Ramez Kazmouz and others, have had limited attention compared to more prominent directors.¹⁸

It is these lacunas in the scholarship on Palestinian cinema that this thesis attempts to address through a focused study into filmmaking by Palestinian citizens of Israel and within Israel. My research considers in more depth the dynamics of production within Israel, it focuses on the younger filmmakers and newer films, which have not yet been addressed by scholars, and it seeks to highlight the films' treatment of aspects of Israeli colonialism, which are highly relevant to Palestinians inside Israel, and less so to Palestinians in the PA or in exile. Its focus is on the way these films, and the filmmakers, relate to the Israeli public sphere and its dominant discourse.

My research seeks to examine how Palestinian film production within the Israeli film industry, where the funding bodies are Zionist and where the filmmakers are insider-outsiders, impinges on the demarcation of both Israeli and Palestinian cinemas as

¹⁸ Presumably either because the films are recent or because they have not gained enough visibility or because their modes and themes did not fit the focus of the writers.

‘national’. What can we learn from a detailed consideration of production processes inside Israel about the kind of political interventions that Palestinian films make within the Israeli public sphere? What understandings about Palestinian films that were made in Israel, even if nuanced, can emerge if we open up the perspective of our analysis to include not only the competing national narratives (Zionism and the Palestinian national narrative) but the wider power relations between Western/ European culture and Arab culture, within which both national narratives are articulated? Finally, what can a focused study of these films tell us about social, cultural and political dynamics within the Palestinian community in Israel?

My hypothesis was that the production of films inside Israel further complicates the boundaries and definitions of both Palestinian and Israeli cinema. Through a detailed analysis of the films and their context of production I sought to show how they reflect the specific circumstances of the Palestinian community in Israel and relate to recent socio-political dynamics. My argument is that the filmmaking processes and the films’ texts allude to a position of ‘in-betweeness’ from which filmmakers negotiate with both the Zionist and the Palestinian national discourses, as well as the wider cultural categories of East and West.

In my discussion of films by Palestinian citizens of Israel I draw on the existing scholarship of Palestinian cinema: mainly on the extensive work of Haim Bresheeth and Gertz and Khleifi but also of others. When relevant, I seek to add to it or to highlight other aspects of films that are related to the focus of this thesis. Beyond the specific scholarship on Palestinian cinema, my approach to film analysis and my research methodology are informed, as that of much of the scholarship on Palestinian cinema, by the wider interdisciplinary research on cinema in the fields of history, anthropology, cultural studies and postcolonial studies. Such studies place films within the wider social, cultural, historical and political contexts, and draw attention to their function in the formation of dominant and alternative discourses, as well as to the contexts of their production.

Cultural studies is an approach to film criticism, which, as Robert Stam (2000) claims, is interested in “embedding media like the cinema in a larger cultural and historical context” (223). It focuses less on “media specificity” and “film language”, but more on the “culture as spread out over a broad discursive continuum, where texts are embedded in a social matrix and where they have consequences in the world...cultural studies calls attention to the social and institutional conditions under which meaning is produced and received” (ibid.: 225). Since the late 1980s, an interest in films as ‘documents’ of history has developed amongst historians and film scholars. Within such writings about film and history, films are seen as representing and referencing their cultural specificity and socio-political historical moments; (Rosenstone, 2006; Zand et al, 2004; Ferro, 1988). Visual anthropologists have been engaged, for some time now, with questions of appropriation and cultural difference in instances of indigenous and ethnic minorities’ media and film production (Ginsburg, 1991, 2002; Moor, 1992; Michaels, 1986; Leigh, 1988; Watherford and Seubert, 1988). Such research has emphasised, as Fay Ginsburg (1991) suggests, that media offers possible means, when others are no longer effective, for “reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people that have experienced massive political, geographic and economic disruption” (217).¹⁹ Similarly, diverse studies with a particular interest in the Postcolonial have engaged with the production of films by subaltern groups. These writings have drawn attention to the ways in which an array of films by ethnic minorities, Third World people, exilic and diasporic communities and indigenous people, function as discursive sites of enunciation of counter-cultures, voicing oppressed historical narratives, and negotiating identities under transformation (Hall, 1992; Shohat and Stam, 1994; Griffith, 1994). Such films have contested colonial and imperialist forms of oppression by reversing the legacy of European Imperialist imagery, and they continue to contest the more obscure forms of neo-colonialism or cultural imperialism.

¹⁹ Ginsburg’s analysis demonstrates how the works of the most active indigenous groups rather than retrieving pre-existing lost identities are actually about “the *process* of identity production...(that) create and assert a position for the present that attempts to accommodate the inconsistencies of present life” (ibid.).

Furthermore, some of these studies emphasize not only the films themselves but also the processes of production. It is because these films are made from positions on the margin that the context of production is central to the analysis and understanding of their significance. Researchers of Third Cinema or more current examples of video activism point to the distinctive strategies of production that are adopted by filmmakers (Gabriel, 1979, 1989). Similarly, in his extensive work on accented cinema Hamid Naficy (2001) stresses that one of the distinctive characteristics of accented cinema is its mode of production, distribution and consumption, and he thus incorporates the context of production into his analysis. Fay Ginsburg (1991; 2002) argues that because indigenous filmmakers' work is innovative in its process as much as in its output, our analytical approach should also shift to include not only the qualities of the films as texts but also the cultural mediation that occurs through film and video work.

Thus, placing this study within such a theoretical approach to film, my research methodology includes both a study of the context of production within Israel and a textual analysis of a selection of films. Since I am interested in the ways in which Palestinian filmmakers position their work at the intersection between the Zionist and Palestinian national discourses, and how they are positioned by the dominant discourses in Israel, my research is also concerned with outlining those discursive regimes. In doing this I rely on sociological, historical, political and ethnographic research about the Palestinian community in Israel. I use these studies primarily in chapter one, which is dedicated to a contextual discussion of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, but also in the more analytical chapters, where I deal with specific films, in order to illustrate the discursive, social and political context within which the films operate. It is important to note that while I sometimes examine the films in relation to these studies, I regard these studies as texts rather than as fixed points of reference or as descriptions of 'reality' against which the films are measured. In other words, the films do not simply reflect a socio-political reality that has been explained in these studies, but participate, with those academic studies, in constructing, reproducing and negotiating notions that make up the discursive environment of Palestinian citizens in Israel.

My discussion of the context of production of Palestinian films in Israel draws on primary research, presented largely in chapters two and three. It is based on archival research and interviews with filmmakers and industry personnel, which I conducted during a number of research trips. The specific sources used are noted in chapter two. My discussion of the context of production is indicative rather than conclusive. While I use 'quantitative data' I did not set out to conduct a quantitative research study.

The first three chapters are therefore concerned with the contexts of theory and production. The following three chapters are organized around prominent and recurrent themes in the films of Palestinians in Israel. I discuss the treatment of these themes in relation to specific examples, and attempt to place this discussion within the wider context of Palestinian cinema and with regard to the specific experience of Palestinians in Israel, emphasizing the films' negotiation with issues of cultural difference and modernity vis-à-vis the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity.

Chapter four examines how Palestinian filmmakers in Israel deal with the representation of the Palestinian historical narrative, primarily the *Nakba*, and the ways in which the films articulate notions of national identity. This has been the focus of many Palestinian films, and of much of the writing about Palestinian cinema, and has often been addressed from a psychoanalytical perspective applying concepts such as trauma and melancholia. My discussion of the films seeks to read the films within their political and production contexts. I compare recent films by younger filmmakers address history and national identity in comparison with the more older and prominent filmmakers and identify a shift in their mode of addressing history.

Chapter five deals with another prominent theme of Palestinian cinema, that of space. It considers the representation of contemporary spaces of Palestinians in Israel and examines how recent films construct spaces, and address movement in space, in relation to their specific experience of living within Israel.

Chapter six deals with the less common, yet important, representation of the *Intifada* in films by Palestinian citizens of Israel. It focuses on three films that were made in response to the 'Battle of Jenin' in 2002 and seeks to examine the particular point of view which these films construct in relation to the Palestinian discourse of the armed struggle.

As my thesis is located in the field of cultural studies rather than screen or film theory, my analysis is less concerned with the genre specificity of the films, and I discuss examples of both documentary and fiction films. While generic conventions are undoubtedly significant to the ways in which the films produce meaning, my primary focus, on the thematic treatment and narratives of the films as they negotiate conflicting discourses, renders the generic differences less relevant to my argument. I therefore do not overtly use dominant film theory perspectives such as psychoanalysis, aesthetic theories or genre theories in my analysis of the films. Rather, I offer primarily a textual analysis that looks at the films' themes and narratives, and some of their aesthetic strategies, but emphasises the ways in which the film texts correspond with the wider historical and political discourse. There are therefore aspects of the films that I do not deal with. For example, I do not explore, beyond a mere note at times, the sound and music scores of the films. Similarly, I do not attempt to identify patterns in the use of visual language or other formal characteristics.

Furthermore, while I place my discussion of the films within the current scholarship on Palestinian cinema at large, since my focus is placed within Israel, and in keeping with the scope of the research, there are several areas that are not addressed. One such important area is the relationship of Palestinian films emerging from Israel to contemporary Arab cinemas. Therefore, I do not deal with production and distribution links between Palestinian-Israeli directors and Arab film industries (which are growing), with the reception of the films in Arab countries, and do not attempt to place the films within the context of Arab cinemas' aesthetics, modes of address and thematic

concerns.²⁰ Another important area is that of gender. While gender relations are a prominent concern of several of the Palestinian films produced inside Israel, this thesis does not address the issue specifically. After serious deliberation I concluded that engaging with the topic of gender in any meaningful way will require an elaborate shift to a very broad theoretical field which merits its own dedicated study, and is therefore beyond the scope of this research.

It is important to make a qualification with regard to the time frame of my research and the selection of examples. The main period of my primary research, when most of the interviews were held, was between 2004 and 2005, but I conducted a number of interviews later in 2007. Most recent developments, after 2007, inside the Israeli industry, or in positions and strategies of filmmakers, are therefore by and large not accounted for. While I attempted to update the research as much as I could (without embarking on another research trip) it is possible that some films that were produced after my primary research period, especially if they were produced outside of Israel, escaped me.

Thus, most of the films that are analyzed in depth in this thesis were produced between 2000 and 2007, although my analysis does include a number of films that were produced before and after those years. The 'older' films that I address were included either to provide a reference point in relation to which I examine the newer films, or treated in more detail if they were overlooked, or in cases where I felt that my argument added something to scholarly analyses already in place. In relation to more recent films, my selection was guided primarily by constraints dictated by the timeframe of this research, and access to the films and the filmmakers within that timeframe. For example, I discuss *Ajami*, which was released in 2009, at some length because I followed the production from its early stages and was therefore familiar with the film. In contrast, films like *Lady Kul el-Arab* (Ibtsam Mara'ana, 2008), Elia Suleiman's *The Time That Remains* (2009) or Sayed Kashua's television series *Arab Labour* (first aired in

²⁰ For example, some of the young filmmakers I interviewed were trained in Cairo or Jordan and increasingly filmmakers travel to the emerging film industry in Doha and the growing interest in the Palestinians inside Israel by global Arab networks such as *Al Jazeera*, forge growing links.

2009) are only mentioned as the timeframe of this research did not allow for a more rigorous analysis.

Furthermore, since the boundaries of Palestinian cinema are intrinsically fluid and shifting, the contours of this research, in terms of the films and filmmakers it includes are not rigidly fixed. While the thesis has a core focus – filmmaking inside Israel and recent films - I do include in my primary discussion some filmmakers that are citizens of Israel and based in the West, such as Suleiman, Tabari, and Aljafari, but not others, such as Hany Abu-Assad or Michel Khleifi. The guiding principle of this selection was the level to which the work of individual filmmakers is connected with ‘proper’ Israel, either in the primary theme of the film and/or the context of production of individual films. I discuss in some length about 20 films of the 35 or so films that were produced within the period of this research by Palestinian-Israelis, and/or within Israel. In order to keep this thesis within a manageable scale other films are only referred to briefly.

The primary language of the majority of the films studied was Arabic, although occasionally also Hebrew and/or English were used. In cases where English subtitles were available these were used when quoting from or referring to the films. In all other cases, the translations are mine. Similarly, quotes from documenters, reviews, interviews and literature in Hebrew are of the author’s translation.

Chapter One

The Palestinian Citizens of Israel: Historical and Theoretical Contexts

This chapter seeks to outline the wider socio-political and theoretical contexts in relation to which I discuss Palestinian filmmaking in Israel. I account for the socio-political context of the Palestinian community in Israel from a postcolonial perspective, which places the Israeli and Palestinian national discourses within a wider framework of European colonialism and its effects. Relying on such postcolonial critique I start by discussing the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity and its ambivalence in relation to the Palestinian citizens. Based on the extensive scholarship on the topic I then briefly chart the chronology of political mobilization of Palestinians in Israel and the main political and ideological positions. Drawing this political map is relevant as a general context against which to examine the films of young Palestinians in Israel and is significant since filmmakers' work is at times nuanced in ways that correspond with the history of Palestinian politics inside Israel. Finally, I discuss the relevance of postcolonial concepts like hybridity, and third spaces to the Palestinian community inside Israel. Such concepts, I argue, not only explain the conditions of Palestinians in Israel better but also provide a more fruitful ground from which to look at the films that were produced by Palestinians in Israel in recent years.

Historically, the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which currently make up nearly 20% of the population, grew out of the diluted Palestinian community that remained, at the end of the 1948 war, within the borders of the newly established Israeli state. Israel's victory in the war changed the geo-political and the demographic situation in the region dramatically and determined the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict thereafter. At the end of the war, the Palestinian community, which until then was an historically-rooted majority in Palestine, ceased to exist as a political and social entity (Kimmerling, 2004). More than 350 Palestinian villages were destroyed and the social and political institutions of the urban centres collapsed (Kimmerling & Migdal 2003: 135). The majority of the population became refugees, spreading initially to neighbouring Arab countries, including the West Bank (then under Jordanian Rule) and the Gaza Strip

(then under Egyptian rule), while only about ten percent of the population (around 150,000 people) remained within the newly expanded borders of Israel.²¹

Remaining within the territories of historic Palestine, the diluted Palestinian population turned from a majority to a minority over night and became citizens of a state whose creation meant the destruction of their people. While for the Palestinians outside historic Palestine the formative experience from then on was that of exile, and this was the core element around which Palestinian life and national identity were gradually reforming, the Palestinian minority in Israel has gone through a somewhat different set of historical developments, which is often referred to as 'inner exile'. Scholars sometimes describe the condition of Palestinians in Israel as a state of "double marginality", being positioned on the fringes of both Israeli and Palestinian national communities, (Al -Haj, 1988) or as having an "accentuated Palestinian identity" (Rouhana, 1993).

On a declarative level, the state of Israel promised equality of rights to all its citizens in its Declaration of Independence of 1948, which forms the principal basis of its legislation. *De facto*, the Palestinian citizens of Israel have never enjoyed full equality; violation of rights and discriminatory policies against Palestinians have been and remain commonplace throughout the history of Israel. In many ways, this is a result of the intrinsic contradiction in the very definition of the state of Israel as Jewish and Democratic at the same time.²² In Israel's current formulation as a Zionist Jewish state, the Palestinian citizens are by and large considered to be non-legitimate participants in the public process of defining the 'Collective Good' of the Israeli (Jewish) nation (Ilan

²¹ In 1947 the Palestinians population was estimated to be between 950,000 and 1.3 million. The exact number of Palestinian refugees at the end of the 1948 war is disputable. Arab estimates ranged between 750,000 and 1,000,000, Israeli sources claimed it to be 520,000 and the British estimates are between 600,000 and 700,000 (Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003: 157). Most sources today quote a number around 700,000 refugees (Ghanem, 2001; Minns & Hijab, 1990, Cayman 1984).

²² Scholars use different models to define the Israeli regime and the civic status of the Palestinian minority. Some merely emphasise the regime's need to navigate between ethnic, democratic-liberal, and security considerations. Others define it as Ethnic Democracy (Samoocha, 2000; Peled, 2000) or apply models of colonialist settler societies, referring to it as master's democracy (Rodison, 1973) or as 'Ethnocracy' (Oren Yiftachel, 1999). While these models differ from one another in important ways, all of them address a situation in which full democratic rights are offered only to the Jewish ethnic majority.

Pappé, 1997). Furthermore, the context of the on-going Israeli-Arab, or Israeli-Palestinian, conflict is often used by the state, and within the dominant Israeli discourse, as a pretext for depriving Palestinian citizens from some of their democratic rights, if they are suspected to endanger Israeli security.

If the relationship of the Palestinian citizens with the Israeli state was marked by ambiguity, ambivalence and equivocality, as Kimmerling and Migdal (2003) argue, then their relationship with Palestinian nationality has been no more certain (180). Subjected to a military regime between 1948 and 1966 that isolated them from the Arab world and from their fellow Palestinians across the borders, the Palestinians in Israel were largely cut out of the struggle to preserve and reconstruct Palestinian nationality that has developed in the refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank, amongst inhabitants of the historical cities and in the scattered exilic communities (Kimmerling, 2004). Apart from within the circles of the Israeli Communist Party (ICP), as I will discuss, under the military regime there was little organised national resistance. This state of affairs has gradually changed since 1967, as Palestinian national politics within Israel grew and the Palestinian community in Israel was increasingly being included in the emerging discourse of national resistance led by the PLO. Before this, as Tamari (1999) claims, “the politics and poetics of exile became so dominant in the formative period that the conditions, aspirations and outlook of these Palestinians that remained in Palestine (almost half the total number of Palestinians) were virtually forgotten” (4).

The ethos of the *Summud* (steadfastness), the notion that living under the Israeli regime but staying on one’s land was in itself a form of resistance, was incorporated into the Palestinian national narrative only during the 1980s and enabled in many ways the inclusion of the Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Palestinian national collective (Tamari, 1999; Kimmerling, 2003). To the image of the *Feday*, the warrior who sacrifice himself in the battle against Zionism, joined the image of the survivor, especially of the *Fellahin* (the peasants). Thus, if the three central concepts of Palestinian resistance are ‘the return’ (*al awda*), the ‘armed struggle’ (*kifah musallaha*) and the ‘steadfastness’

(*sumud*) (Salti, 2010; Kimmerling, 2003), then the Palestinian community in Israel, who stayed on the land of historic Palestine, is primarily associated with the *sumud*.

The Zionist Discourse of Euro-Modernity and its ambivalence

Recent postcolonial critique places the discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within a wider critique of modernity (Shohat, 2006; Lavie, 2007; LeVine, 2007, 2005; Montenescu, 2007a, 2007b). Critique from this perspective stresses that Zionism (and the Israeli Zionist state) is not merely an occupying force, or even merely a colonialist force, but rather it is a particular kind of colonialism that emerged out of a discourse of Euro-modernity (LeVine, 2007). As Smadar Lavie poignantly suggested, rather than it being an Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or even a Jewish-Arab conflict, it is in fact a European-Arab conflict, in which some of the Europeans are Jews.²³ Sharing the same perspective, Mark LeVine (2005) argues that “...the epistemological and ontological premises of Zionism conclusively demonstrate...that on the discursive and material levels, Zionism is a seminal example of the discourses of modernity and colonialism and their mutual embeddedness, demonstrating the impossibility of conceiving one apart from the other” (16).

Postcolonial critique of Zionism then unpicks the colonial modernist discourse that informed Zionism in its conception and continues to inform the current Israeli discourse (Shohat, 2006, 1998; LeVine, 2007; Montenescu, 2007; Massad, 1996; Shenhav, 2004). Rather than being a unique phenomenon, as it is often understood to be, Zionism is very much a movement of national emancipation that is a product of its time and place. Formed by European Jews in late nineteenth century, Zionism sought to rescue the Jewish ‘Other of Europe’ from persecution by appropriating the European model of the nation state.²⁴

²³ As put by Smadar Lavie in a lecture at the LSE in 2007.

²⁴ For a more elaborate discussion of this point see: Massad, 1996; Shohat, 1998.

The Zionist project therefore entailed a construction of a New Jew, which was modelled on the European (White) modern man and which stood in opposition to the stereotypical Diasporic Jew that had troubled Europe for centuries (Peled, 2002). The new Jewish state, as in Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland*, was envisaged as a quintessentially modern Western and secular state, for all that this implies in terms of technological developments, progressive ideas and governing systems. The following quote of Max Nordau, one of the leaders of the Zionist movement, illustrates the extent to which the Zionist imaginary equated itself with European culture and heritage:

We would never allow that the return of the Jews to their land would be a retreat to barbarism...the Jewish nation would develop its uniqueness within the general Western culture, as any other cultured nation, not outside of it, in savage Asia, the enemy to culture... (Quoted in Peled 2002: 27).

Zionist, and later Israeli, historiography was governed by the same myths that have long dominated European historiography of the Middle East. These argue that the Ottoman region of the Middle East was stagnated and pre-modern prior to the arrival of European colonization (roughly dating back to the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon) and that the penetration of the technologies and ideas of modernity brought about by imperialism set in motion a process of progress and modernisation, but had also constituted a 'crisis' that Middle Eastern people have been attempting to resolve ever since (Joseph Massad, 2007; LeVine, 2006). In this historical narrative, the Zionist European Jews, who had been emigrating to the region of Palestine since the late nineteenth century, were agents of modernity. The ancient land of Israel was perceived as a neglected decaying district of the Ottoman Empire, a desert that would be made to bloom by the Zionist enterprise by means of intensive modernisation (such as industrialization and the implementation of technologies, government and organisational practices and progressive secular ideas). The native traditional Arab population was to benefit from the modernity brought about by the Jews.

Thus, the Zionist (and later Israeli-Zionist) discourse reproduced the same binary oppositions between modernity and tradition that typify European Orientalist discourses. The Other against which the imagined Zionist-Israeli identity is defined is

not merely the Palestinian but the Arab in general and the Middle East space in its entirety. Non-European Jews that were encouraged to immigrate to Israel after its establishment – like Yemenite, Moroccans, Iraqis, Syrians, Kurds, Turkish, Algerians, Indians and others - were also constructed as Others. Ella Shoat (2006), in her seminal critique of Zionism, demonstrates how the culture and identity of Arab-Jews (*Mizrahim*) has been suppressed by the Zionist narrative, similarly to Palestinian identity and culture, and have constructed in turn split subject positions amongst the *Mizrahim*.²⁵ As in the case of the native Arabs of Palestine, the Zionist discourse entailed a narrative of ‘rescue’ and modernisation in relation to the Jew of the Middle East. As Shohat puts it:

In Israel, the ideology of modernization shaped both policy and identity within the formation of the nation-state. The modernization narrative has projected a Western national identity for a state geographically located in the Middle East and populated by Eastern European Jews as well as by a Middle Eastern majority – both Palestinians and non-Ashkenazi Jews. The dominant discourse of Euro-Israeli policy makers and scholars has suggested that Asian and African Jews – not unlike the Palestinian population – originated from “primitive”, “backward”, “underdeveloped”, “premodern”, societies and therefore, unlike Ashkenazim, require modernization (346).

This has created ambivalence at the heart of the Zionist relationship to space, at once romanticizing the space as the utopian ‘promised land’ and rejecting the historical and material ‘reality’ of the space within the Arab Middle East (Raz-Karkotzkin, 2004; Gurevitch, 2007; Monterescu, 2009).

Viewed from a postcolonial perspective, the socio-political dynamics of the Palestinian community in Israel, and its relationship with Zionism, are not only shaped by the national conflict but operate in the matrix of discourses of modernity and nationalism. For the Palestinian citizens of Israel – unlike the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza or in the diasporas – the experience of being a national minority entailed living under mechanisms of power that are reminiscent of European colonialism, especially in relation to what Homi Bhabha (1994) described as the colonialist attempt to produce

²⁵While *Mizrahim* is the popular term used in reference to the Jews who came from North Africa and the West of Asia, other terms are also used. According to Shohat (2006), this ambiguous and shifting terminology is indicative of ambivalent subject position of this population.

colonised subjects who are 'same-but-not-quite', through the project of cultural imposition. The ambivalence of the Zionist discourse and its internal contradictions – for example in the need to maintain the contradiction between racial (Jewish) and liberal-democratic values – are manifested in the discursive oscillation between inclusion and exclusion of the Palestinians and are reflected, on a more material level, in policies of education, culture and development.

Over the years the Israeli state has employed a range of mechanisms to eliminate sentiments of Palestinian nationality amongst Palestinians living in Israel, attempting instead to 'produce' an 'Israeli Arab' citizen and to engender feelings of belonging and loyalty to the state of Israel. One manifestation of this process is the very act of naming. In the Israeli public discourse (as in others) the term often used in relation to the Palestinian minority is 'Israeli Arabs'. The official term (used by the state interchangeably) is *Bnei Miutim* (literally translated as 'members of minorities'). This term further excludes any specific signifier of collective or national identity. At the same time, other ethnic and religious identities such as Druze, Bedouin, Armenian or Christian, are emphasised in the official and popular discourses. Another example is the strictly regulated curriculum of the state's Arab education system, designed to foster an 'Israeli-Arab' identity. The curriculum of Arab schools in Israel includes Zionist-Jewish history and Hebrew literature; while Arab history and culture are studied, the curriculum focuses on ancient times and general Arab culture, overlooking the modern history of the region and any specific Palestinian history or culture (Al Haj 1995; 1996).

Other mechanisms relate to economic development and landscape design; within the paradigm of Euro-modernity the Zionist project from its inception till today is invested in reconfiguring the space of mandatory Palestine from an 'Arab' and 'traditional' place into one which is Jewish *and* modern. Especially in 'proper' Israel, this entailed processes that LeVine (2005) calls "creative destructions" (a term which I will use from now on), "constituting an aesthetic of erasure and reinscription, that is at the heart of modern ideologies of planning and development" (16).

Thus, Palestinian history and culture were erased from the landscape and the Arab citizens were marginalised within the Israeli public sphere. This erasure is manifested in different ways, for example the repopulation of Arab villages by new Jewish immigrants; the assigning of Hebrew names to sites, roads, villages and towns, while eliminating the Arab names; the redrawing of official maps and appropriating relics and heritage sites in order to reinforce the historical connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.²⁶

At the same time, despite on-going structural discrimination, over the years processes of 'modernization' transformed Arab 'places' (villages and Arab neighborhoods in the mixed cities) and changed the socio-economic structure of the Palestinian minority (Kimmerling and Migdal, 2003; Al-Haj, 2000; Bishara, 2000). In the first decades land expropriations (especially during the 1950s) deprived many Palestinian farmers of their livelihood and created great dependency on the Jewish economy. Thousands were forced to move from being farmers to being a cheap labour force for the rapidly developing Jewish economy, working in agriculture and servitude in neighbouring Jewish towns (Stendel, 1996; Kimmerling, 2003; Ghanem, 2001). Gradually Arab villages turned into towns. The economic boom in Israel after 1967 also affected the Palestinian community. Many moved from being workers to owners of small businesses, and gradually an educated middle class and an Arab industrial sector developed. General standards of living and levels of education have risen considerably over the years, but a substantial socio-economic gap between the Palestinian minority and the Jewish majority prevails, as does ongoing state discrimination (Bishara, 2000: 37; Kimmerling, 2004).

This double process of de-Arabization *and* modernisation is manifested on a discursive level in terminology which betrays the intrinsic ambivalence of Zionism. Stripped from the national and excluded from the political, the Palestinian community in Israel is often regarded as one of Israeli society's several 'sectors': the Russian, the Religious (referring only to the orthodox Jews, Zionists and non-Zionists) the *Mizrahi* and so on. While

²⁶ On the Judaisation of the Israeli landscape, modern architecture and the spread of Jewish heritage sites see the extensive work of Efrat, 2004.

together amounting to the majority of the population of Israel, all of these 'sectors' are perceived as being at the margins of a hegemonic centre that is Jewish, *Ashkenazi* (European/Western Jew), modern and secular.

In the Israeli public discourse issues relating to the socio-economic gap between 'sectors' or the assimilation of Palestinians into Israeli society are referred to as 'social', while the term 'political' often references issues concerned with the national conflict. This discursive split between the 'social' and 'political' enables on one hand the demarcation of the Palestinian citizens as *Others* when it comes to the national question, and on the other, marks them as just one of the many 'minority' groups that are the sign of Israel's heterogenic society. It is a discursive regime and a political strategy that enables oscillation between exclusion and inclusion of the Palestinians within the Israeli collective. As this separation defines much of the Israeli public discourse it is not uncommon to hear Palestinian speakers use the same discursive separation, including some of the filmmakers I interviewed for this thesis.

The discursive demarcation of the Palestinian community as the 'Arab sector' or the 'Israeli Arabs', creates a sense of pseudo-equality between the different 'minority' communities in Israel, and by so doing masks the structural inequality in relation to Palestinians. It allows the Zionist left to maintain the intrinsic contradiction of Israel as liberal and democratic striving for human rights and equality for all its citizens, despite the national conflict and the inherently colonialist nature of the Zionist project. This is the doublethink (to use Bhabha's term) of Israeli democracy, its internal contradiction and ambivalence.

Within this discourse, which also governs much of the sociological research in Israel (Bishara, 2000), what hinders the assimilation Palestinian citizens into Israeli society is not discrimination alone, or the national conflict, but gaps in modernisation. According to this framework of explanation, the traditional Arab society has not yet modernised itself enough to compete with its Jewish counterpart. The process of modernization it underwent since 1948 (by virtue of its contact with the Jewish modern society)

constitutes a 'crisis' which has accounted for many of its current social 'ills', such as crime, limited political mobilization, patriarchal gender relations and so on.²⁷

It is against this backdrop that Palestinian political action and cultural production in Israel are formed. The political agenda of Palestinians in Israel was never uniform; neither can the Palestinian society be described as a monolithic bloc. Diverse ideological standpoints and political agendas existed in Palestinian politics before the establishment of Israel and continued to develop thereafter. Some of these agendas foreground what are perceived as 'internal' or 'social' issues - such as discriminatory policies, the socio-economic gap and inequality of rights - other agendas connect the 'internal' struggle to the 'political' and the national. Furthermore, over the years there have been shifts in the political mobilization of Palestinians, and of ideological positions, whose patterns and meanings have been subject to extensive academic debates. This, I will seek to show, transpires also in Palestinian films made in Israel. The ambivalence of the Israeli disocurse impinges upon processes of production and distribution, while processes of 'creative destruction' which emerge from the disocurse of Euro-modernity are being addressed by filmmakers.

The political map of Palestinian citizens of Israel

Chronologies of the political mobilization of the Palestinian citizens tend to divide it into two main periods: the first under the Military Government (between 1948 and 1966) and characterised by economic deprivation and lack of organised political protest, and the second beginning in the 1970s and characterised by the emergence of organised political protest (Ghanem, 2001, Rekhess, 1993, 1996; Kimmerling 2003; Landau, 1993; Bligh, 2003; Kaufman-Gainesville, 1997).

The Military Government, set up shortly after the war, controlled every aspect of Palestinian economic, social, cultural and political life and isolated the Palestinians inside Israel from the Arab world and from their fellow Palestinians across the borders.

²⁷ For examples of this framework of explanation see Strenal, 1996.

While the Palestinian citizens had the right to vote and to be elected to the Israeli parliament, freedom of movement, expression and organization were severely restricted. Social institutions and political organisations were supervised in order to prevent the development of national protest. Attempts to form political parties that expressed national aspirations were prohibited and outlawed, and the Palestinian press was strictly supervised and censored (Ghanem, 2001).²⁸

Political participation largely manifested itself in voting for the socialist Zionist parties, primarily the ruling Zionist party *Mapai*.²⁹ The dominant political discourse focused on 'improving the conditions' rather than equality of individual or national rights (Bishara, 2000; Ghanem, 2001; Kimmerling, 2003; Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, 2002). Much of the support for the Zionist parties was orchestrated by traditional clan (*Hamula*) leaders and villages' *Mukhtars*, who were offered 'benefits' (like travel permits, jobs or the use of expropriated land) by *Mapai* and other Zionist parties in return for Arab votes. According to Ghanem (2001), the core ideology of leaders that were active in Jewish-Zionist parties, who form the 'Israeli-Arab' stream in his typology of Palestinian politics in Israel, has always been the acceptance of Zionism as the defining principle of the state of Israel, and the Israeli component of the identity of its Palestinian citizens.

Many of the scholars explain that the dominance of the Israeli-Arab political stream, to use Ghanem's terminology, and the limited political protest, resulted from Israeli policies of dispossession, control and supervision. The need to survive economically, and the techniques of control and supervision that were exercised by the Israeli authorities, helped to foster a culture of dependency and a fear of political activism that in many ways characterised the first generation of Palestinian citizens. According to Ghanem (2001), techniques like the 'benefit' system "deterred many Israeli-Palestinian citizens from political activity, prevented the consolidation of a national leadership and encouraged 'conciliatory' elements among the Arabs", while economic and social state

²⁸ Of the diverse Palestinian press that existed in Palestine under British Mandate, only the governmental daily *al-Yaum* and the Communist paper *al-Ittihad* were allowed to continue to appear (Ghanem, 2001).

²⁹ For the first 30 years Israel's political system was characterised by a one-party system. Mapai, the socialist party which preceded the current Israeli Labour party, had been in power from 1948 until 1977, when it was defeated by the right-wing Likud party.

policies were designed, “to eliminate any possibility that the Arabs would amass economic power or capital that could help them to achieve political liberation” (Ibid: 20). According to Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker (2002), for this first generation of survivors “the necessities of life like work, raising children, or preserving the Arabic language, were a political statement of survival and struggle in their own right” (Ibid.: 37).

Against this backdrop, vocal political protest during the years of the Military Government was sporadic and by-and-large non-institutionalized (Payes, 2005; Zureik, 1979). First attempts to form national Palestinian parties (like *Arab Front* in 1958 and *Asrat al- Ard* in the mid-1960s) were outlawed by Israel and did not manage to gain much support within the Palestinian community. The other important opposition to Zionism came from the joint Jewish-Arab Israeli Communist Party (ICP) (Ghanem, 2001; Rekheess 1993; Kimmerling, 2004). While the ICP was always on the fringes of Israeli politics and traditionally an opposition party, it has for many years been the only legitimate political party that opposed Zionism. Its core ideology, since 1948, was based on an objection to the Zionist definition of the state as Jewish. It rejected the Military Government and it was the first party to protest against land expropriation, to demand the right of the Palestinian refugees to return and to call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state to exist alongside Israel. Yet, it was only towards the end of the 1960s that the ICP started to gain more power in the Palestinian community and gradually captured a substantial part of the Palestinian vote.

The second period in the history of Palestinians in Israel is marked by the emergence of organised political protest. A set of changing circumstances contributed to this shift. Internally, the end of the military government in 1966 eased the tight restrictions and supervision that governed Palestinian daily life and enabled the gradual development of an open political debate. This, coupled with a wider change in the Israeli political system - as the hegemonic party *Mapai* lost the election in 1977 and a more competitive political environment emerged – strengthened the Palestinian citizens’ confidence to use their vote more strategically (Ghanem, 2001, Bishara 2000). The rise in general

standards of living and access to higher education have also contributed to political mobilization (ibid). Externally, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, and the subsequent opening of the borders, renewed the contact with the Palestinians across the Green Line and enabled the reestablishment of political links.

New patterns of political activism have developed since the 1970s, fronted by a new generation (rather than *Mukhtars* and heads of Clans), often of university graduates. Political agendas revolved around the struggle for equality of rights. New Palestinian political parties and public organisations emerged on both local and national level; local politics grew more independent and significant (as Palestinian councils and municipalities become an important hub of political activity) and an active civil society, characterised by a rapidly growing number of Palestinian NGOs, gradually developed.

The most visible manifestation of this shift in political activism was the organised protest on the 30th March 1976. Following a disclosure of a (secret) governmental plan for a large-scale land expropriation in the north of the country, a wave of Palestinian protest erupted. Strikes and demonstrations were held across the country, bringing together the different political movements and were led, by and large, by young protestors. The protest later became known as the Land Day events and came to symbolise the emergence of national consciousness of Palestinians in Israel (Bishara, 2000). Commemorated by Palestinians in Israel every year since, the Land Day is seen as an historical milestone in the development of Palestinian political activism in Israel (Payes, 2005; Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, 2002; Yiftachel, 2006).

During the 1970s and the 1980s the ICP became the centre of political, cultural and intellectual activity within the Palestinian community. As Kimmerling (2003) explains:

[ICP] served not only as a political party but also as a nurturing site for a new Arab, mostly Christian, cultural elite. Arab poets, writers, philosophers, journalists, and teachers created a kind of counterculture, posed against the dominant Hebrew culture. But, if this culture was out of step with the dominant intellectual climate in Israel, it was also almost completely disassociated from cultural developments in other Arab states. The party newspaper, periodicals, and Arab publishing houses served as a greenhouse

for the flowering of the new intelligentsia in Israel. In the Palestinian Arab context, both inside and outside Israel, almost no differentiation was made between politics and art (186).

Writers like Samih el-Kassem, Emile Habibi, Tawfik Ziad and the Palestinian national poet Mahmood Darwish have all worked within the cultural committee of the ICP and were seen as national leaders. Some, like Darwish, left Israel after 1967, others, like Habibi, chose to stay. According to Elad-Buskila (2001a), Palestinian literature in Israel can be divided into two distinct periods. The first period, between 1948 and 1967 was characterised by a tendency to highlight Arab identity and affiliations with a pan-Arabism. The second periods started after 1967 and was characterised by an emergence of a distinct Palestinian identity in the works. The beginning of Palestinian filmmaking in Israel also emerged within the ICP, as I will discuss in the forthcoming chapter.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 1967 war and with the strengthening of the PLO, new national parties emerged. A primary example was *The Sons of the Village*, which was formed in 1972 and became a significant player in the local politics of Palestinians in Israel, although still in the minority. While the national parties shared the core ideology of the communists, in terms of demanding a secular one-state on all the territory of historic Palestine, they tended to favour Palestinian-only organisations and their political rhetoric was often more militant. They openly negated the existence of the state of Israel and at times called for the boycotting of participation in Israeli politics altogether. More recent national political parties such as the National Democratic Assembly (NDA, known in Arabic as *ta'jamua* and in Hebrew as *Badal*) shifted their political strategies and participated in the Israeli general elections, at times in collaboration with the recent successors of the communist parties (represented in recent years by the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality).³⁰

³⁰ The DEPE, known in Hebrew as *Hadash*, was originally formed as an extra-parliamentary umbrella organisation that brought together Arab and Jewish communist and socialist political organisations. Since the 1990s it participated in the Israeli elections. The NDA participated in Israeli general elections since 1996, at first in collaboration with DEPE and later independently. In the five elections since (1996, 1999, 2003, 2006 and 2009) the NDA won between 2 to 5 seats in the Knesset.

An Islamic movement has started to emerge since the late 1970s prompted initially by youngsters who were now able to study in the Islamic colleges in the West Bank (Rabinowitz, 1994). By and large, the Islamic movement in Israel distanced itself from national activity and focused mainly on local politics and social activity at a grassroots level.³¹ Operating largely at the municipal level, it increased its power significantly over the years in several towns and villages, largely at the expense of the Communists. The political agenda of the Islamist movement is not easily pinned down (Rabinowitz, 1994). In relation to issues of equality of rights inside Israel the movement's strategy tended to favour pragmatic action over political campaigning, including negotiating with the Israeli Zionist authorities (Ghanem, 2001). In relation to national politics and positions about the overall Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its religious leaders speak in different voices (Rekhess, 2000; Rabinowitz, 1994). For example, in relation to the Oslo peace process, Rekhess (2000) identified two main camps within the Islamic movement, one which saw it as a necessary evil and supported *Fatah*, and one which opposed it and affiliated more with *Hamas*. While the Islamic identity and religion is at the forefront of its agenda, the movement has never campaigned for the formation of Palestine as a Muslim state and generally its political rhetoric articulates identity in national or cultural terms (Palestinian and/or Arab) (Rekhess, 2000; Ghanem, 2001).

While voting for Zionist parties continues, over the years there have been major shifts in the positions and modes of organization of the 'Israeli-Arab' political stream (Ghanem, 2001). While its political agenda is still guided by the struggle for equality of individual rights (rather than as a national minority) and integration of the Arab minority into Israeli society, increasingly, since the first *Intifada*, the leaders of this stream gradually have begun to criticize Israeli policies in the occupied territories and, in recent decades, there has been a greater tendency to vocalize affiliations with the Palestinian people, yet not at the expense of an Israeli identity (ibid).

³¹ Similar to the manner in which Islamic movements have operated elsewhere, the Islamic movement in Israel gradually established a largely voluntary network of social organisations that provided welfare, medical and educational services to the Palestinian population. Over the years the movement established a network of nurseries, medical centres, sports and community centres, and Muslim colleges, and tackled social issues that were neglected by local authorities and the state's welfare system, such as the high rate of crime and drug addiction in Palestinian communities.

Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker (2002: 46) whose analysis of the political mobilization of Palestinians in Israel revolved around the concept of sociological generations, pointed out that by 2000 the second generation, which led the shift in political activism since the 1970s, has been exhausted by the minimal improvement they managed to achieve.

In October 2000, a month after the outbreak of the *Al-Aksa Intifada*, a spontaneous wave of protest, demonstrating solidarity with the *Intifada*, swept through the Palestinian community in Israel.³² During these demonstrations, in which many youths took part, violent clashes between the Palestinian demonstrators and the armed Israeli police forces occurred in several places. Thirteen Palestinian citizens were killed by Israeli police, and many more were wounded. For many Palestinian citizens the October 2000 events, as they became known, marked a crisis point in their relationship with the state and fostered even greater feelings of frustration, disillusionment and mistrust in the possibility of equality for Palestinians in Israel. The public inquiry that was appointed by the government, the Or Commission Inquiry, did not ease these feelings. Despite its conclusions that there was serious misconduct by police officers and its recommendations for an in-depth examination of on-going structural discrimination against the Palestinian population, a decade after the events many of its recommendations have yet to be implemented.

Several scholars have noted that the impact of these events on Palestinian politics in Israel was highly significant, and suggest that they mark another turning point in the history of Palestinians in Israel (Yiftachel, 2006; Payes, 2005; Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, 2002). Yiftachel (2006) considers the October 2000 events to be a new milestone, after the Land Day events in 1976, in the development of Palestinian political mobilization. Payes (2005), who researched the activity of Palestinian NGOs in Israel, suggested that the crisis that was brought about by the events of October 2000 had major implications for Palestinian NGOs. NGOs gained increased importance as

³² The demonstrations started mainly in Northern Israel – around the area of Nazareth and Unm el Phahem and then spread to Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa, Ramle and other places.

negotiators between the Palestinian public and the Israeli state and the events triggered a shift in the focus of many NGOs from issues of civil rights to issues of human rights. This is significant since the latter is more associated with the work of NGOs in the West Bank and Gaza, and was hardly part of the political discourse of Palestinians in Israel.

Dan Rabinowitz and Khawlla Abu-Baker (2002: 18) argue that the unprecedented demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinians across the Green Line in October 2000, which differed significantly from the hesitant support that Palestinian citizens of Israel expressed publicly during the first *Intifada*, signalled the emergence of a new sociological generation, the 'Stand Tall generation'. Rabinowitz and Abu Baker argue that for this generation:

The relative success of the Palestinian national project and the national pride it managed to endorse during the 1990s, highlighted in greater strength the failures of the internal struggle for equality of rights. More and more young Palestinians perceived the struggle for equality of rights, especially through the parliamentary route, as akin to Sisyphus pushing a rock up the hill; an experience which involves bitter and humiliating competition over crumbs of appreciation and respect... (53).

Under these circumstances, Rabinowitz and Abu Baker (2002) suggest, Palestinian nationality, and affiliation with the struggle in the West Bank and Gaza, has then gradually become a more appealing point of identification.

Other scholars have criticised Rabinowitz's and Abu Baker's conclusion, claiming that they were too quick to ascribe to this new generation a position of Palestinian politics and identity. For example, Khalil Rinnawi (2003: 131), in response to Abu Baker and Rabinowitz, refers to this young generation as the 'McDonald's generation'. Focusing on the spreading of Western consumerist culture in the Palestinian society in Israel, he argued that this generation only seems to be 'standing tall' but in fact, being Israeli is an integral part of the identity of its members and is not challenged. According to Rinnawi's analysis, a performance of 'standing tall' is the most visible sign of the 'Israeliness' of this generation; its self-assurance does not exceed but rather exists within the boundaries of its Israeli identity. Similarly, the sociologist Sami Samoocha

(2007), who conducts an annual survey of Arab-Jewish relations in Israel, points out that while his latest findings indicate some radicalisation in the positions of Palestinians in Israel towards the state, ultimately the findings do not confirm the 'Palestinisation' theory).

The generational shift, especially in relation to notions of political activism and national identity is, I argue, highly relevant to the understanding of Palestinian films made in Israel, as I will discuss in detail in chapter four.

Hybridity and young Palestinians in Israel

The disagreement between scholars over the patterns of political mobilization amongst Palestinian youth reveals the level to which academic research in Israel tends to "analyse complex social phenomena through the lens of nationalism and the nation state" (Monterescu, 2007a: 167).³³ While the application of the terms 'Israelisation' and 'Palestinisation' by different scholars requires critical unpacking which is beyond the scope of this thesis, I would point out, following Oren Yiftachel, that the dichotomy between them forces a rigidity that fails to explain the complexity of the political mobilization of the Palestinian minority. As Yiftachel argues (2006), it is a false dichotomy because there is little evidence to suggest that the two are mutually exclusive and its framework fails to treat seriously "the nuances and intertwining realities of nationalism, space and civic concerns, and the impact of Israel's ethnic geography" (Ibid.: 165).

Indeed, the attempt by the scholars discussed above to explain the current dynamics in Palestinian society in relation to a binary opposition of 'Israelisation' vs. 'Palestinisation' seems to overshadow many of the similarities in their descriptions of

³³ Monterescu relies on Ulrich Beck's concept of 'methodological nationalism'. 'Methodological nationalism', according to Beck (2003), is the dominant perspective in social sciences that assumes the normative claim for national self-determination (that is expressed and exercised by political actors) as a socio-ontological given.

the young generation, which point towards characteristics that postcolonial theorists would have perhaps termed as ambivalence, hybridity and strategic essentialism.

Thus, Rabinowitch and Abu Baker (2002) explained that the Stand Tall generation starts its political journey from a point of detachment (from fixed ideologies and political agendas), and moves forward in ways that “leave all options open”. The basic experience of the Stand-Tall generation, argued the authors, “is that of conflict; conflict between them and the state, between generations and between ideologies of class, religious, and gender” (Ibid.: 55). Like Rinnawi they described this generation as more individualistic and confident, in comparison to previous generations and guided by values that are similar to their Jewish-Israeli contemporaries. For the members of the ‘Stand Tall generation’, wrote Rabinowitch and Abu-Baker:

The belief in education and skills as agents for social and political change is almost a second nature... while they are involved in political activity, especially during their years at university, to many of them personal professional success is an important ambition and they...constantly deal with the tension between their individual professional development and political development of the community (61-2).

Moreover, according to Samoooha (2007), while “Palestinisation of the Arab identity”, “the strengthening of Islamic fundamentalism” and “the frustration and disillusionment with the ongoing discrimination” are indeed processes that exist and “estrangle the Arabs from the Jews and from the state”, these processes are counterbalanced by other processes, “the most noticeable of which is the process of ‘Israelisation’ of the Arabs that is manifested in a few areas: in being bi-lingual and bi-cultural, in their attachment to the state of Israel and in their strong affiliation with the advantages of living in Israel (modern life style, a stable democratic regime, welfare state...” (Ibid.: 3). These findings reinforced Samoooha’s earlier conclusions, in which he claimed that the cross-pressures that the Palestinian minority in Israel is exposed to, much like other minorities around the world, foster the formation of a hybrid minority (1999).

Similarly, the sociologist and politician Azmi Bishara argued in 2000 that the connection of the Palestinian citizens to the Israeli way of life is no longer merely instrumental.

With the passage of time complex social and cultural processes created mutual influences and reformations, which fostered the development of a particular Israeli-Arab identity and culture, however split it may be. As Bishara (2000) puts it:

In the past, the expression Israeli-Arab did not reflect the reality but the Zionist ideology. There were Arabs in Israel or Arab-Palestinians in Israel. The new thing is exactly the emergence of an Israeli-Arab. Indeed this is a term that admits to internal contradiction, but this is not the only tragedy of this distorted identity, for it is an identity that rather than balancing the two contradictory elements it subjects one to the other (48).

Applying theoretical concepts such as hybridity, which stem from postcolonial theory, to the Palestinian community in Israel, or to the Palestinian/Israeli case in general, is not without its complications. As a theoretical concept, hybridity has been used extensively by scholars of cultural studies and postcolonial theory, and has generated elaborated scholarly debate about its meaning and its effects. For Homi Bhabha (1994) “hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority - its rules of recognition” (34). The ambivalence of the colonial discourse, and the process of mimicry of the colonial culture, which is at the heart of the production of colonial subjects, will always produce slippages, an excess that could not be contained by colonial power. This excess is what Bhabha refers to as a form of hybridity that is subversive and destabilizes the authority of the colonial discourse, by virtue of the fact that it does not allow it to define difference clearly and exposes its doublethink and ambivalence.

Hybridity has also often been taken to mean forms of “mixtures” of cultural production or identity performances. In relation to postcolonial diasporic communities in the West, hybridity was often celebrated and theorized in a terminology of being ‘all at once’ and being able to ‘play’ with the different elements of identity and cultures (Joseph, 1999; Brah and Coombes 2002; Werbner and Modood; 1997). Yet, as Brah and Coombes (2002) have argued, historicizing the concept of hybridity and acknowledging the geographical contexts in which the terms of the debate circulates is necessary in order

to understand its effects. In the particular context of Israel/Palestine, in which colonialism is not in any way 'post', neither in the temporal nor the conceptual meaning of the pre-fix, the contemporary Israeli and Palestinian discourses are still very much dominated by essentialist national terminology.³⁴

The emergence of cultural production that is self-evidently a mixture of Palestinian and Israeli culture, is by no means routine and is relatively recent. For example, in his analysis of "Israeli-Arab literature", Ami Elad-Buskila (2001a) argued that despite the growing encounters with Israeli society and culture after 1966, which have influenced the Arab society in general, the Arab literature in Israel is generally not influenced by Israeli-Hebrew literature. Elad-Buskila points out to only a few exceptions of Palestinian writers who write in Hebrew as well as in Arabic. One such example is *Arabesques* (1986) Anton Shamas's exceptional novel that was published in Hebrew. The novel's several narrators are all novelists who grapple with stories about *Same* and *Other*. Formally, the novel merges the structure of the traditional oral tale, the Arabesque, with the Hebrew language. The novel's hybrid form was seen by critics as subversive. As Hanan Hever (1991) argued, the novel "positions its Israeli-Jewish readers in a destabilized position. On the one hand they can not disavow it as a complete Other...on the other hand the ways in which it breaks the common boundaries of the Hebrew culture makes it difficult for us to identify with and incorporate" (35).³⁵

Scholars like Kimmerling and Bishara have argued that there is a unique 'Israeli-Arab' culture that has emerged over the years.³⁶ In his ethnographic study of contemporary spatial socio-political dynamics in Jaffa, Monterescu (2009) lists a number of hybrid cultural productions that sprang up, paradoxically, as a result of the October 2000 events, which revived political activism in the town. Among the examples that Monterescu lists is the work of the filmmaker Scandar Copti, whose films I will discuss

³⁴ For a fascinating discussion of the ways in which postcolonial theoretical concepts are appropriated into the Israeli academic discourse see Ella Shohat, 2004.

³⁵ Shamas's writing and public statements often triggered political controversies in Israel. See: Kimmerling, (2008) 222-234, for a discussion of one of these controversies during the 1980s.

³⁶ It is important to note that while Bishara describes conditions of hybridity and processes of mimicry, he does not suggest that these are subversive.

in the following chapters. Such projects, Monterescu claims, propose “a real binational alternative to conservative political consensus in Israeli society”, and undermine not only the “Orientalism of the ‘Zionist story’ but also any essentialist nationalist narrative as such” (668).

Despite the escalation of the conflict and the prevalence of national discourses, ‘denied knowledges’, to use Bhabha’s term, increasingly infiltrate the Israeli public sphere and subvert the Zionist discourse. These infiltrations are made by Palestinian artists, writers and filmmakers, who work inside Israel, and often through new political and cultural initiatives that are joint (Jewish and Palestinian Israelis), and which are often bilingual. One example is Café Yafa, a bookstore café and a cultural centre. The café is under joint Jewish-Arab ownership and functions as the meeting point for Palestinian and Jewish intellectuals and artists, as well as residents of Jaffa. It holds regular cultural events (mainly of Palestinian culture) and promotes activities such as local action groups, which are dedicated to exposing the Palestinian history of the city in the Israeli public sphere. One of these action groups, ‘Yafa Action’, is a joint Jewish-Palestinian study group, comprising of Palestinian residents and Jewish gentrifiers, which is dedicated to bringing change through the study of the history and sociology of the city (Monterescu, 2009). Other examples include the organisation ‘Zochrot’ (remembering), which is dedicated to raising awareness of the Nakba and the art project ‘Autobiography of a City’, which offers new tools to reconstruct Jaffa’s history through artistic interventions in its urban landscape.

Furthermore, forms of hybrid cultural production are evidently more common among the younger generations. This is manifested in the writing of the author Sayed Kashua, who writes exclusively in Hebrew, in the Rap music of groups like Dam (literally “blood” in both Hebrew and Arabic), whose lyrics are a mixture of Arabic, Hebrew and English and in the Café culture that has emerged on Ben Gurion street in Haifa in recent years. Importantly, in these cultural “mixtures”, neither ‘Israeli’ nor ‘Palestinian’ cultural signs are fixed. While bearing their own historical specificities of the two national cultures, both Israeli and Palestinian cultures are in constant flux of signification *and* operate in

an increasingly global cultural context. The music group *Dam*, for example, appropriated the (by now global) cultural sign of Rap music to the specificities of Arabic and Hebrew as it is used in their hometown Lydd (Lod). At times, subversions of the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity, which is epitomized in the notion that Israel is the agent of Western modernity, take the form of cultural productions which negotiate with Western cultural signs 'over the head' of Israeli culture.

In this particular context of contemporary Israel, as the debates between the scholars demonstrate, political action and cultural production of young Palestinians take different forms. These do not easily fit within either hybridity or essentialism, in itself a theoretical binary that can be rather rigid and restrictive (Fuss, 1990). Side by side political strategies exist, which resist Zionism on the one hand by assuming an essentialist Palestinian position, rejecting links with Israel, refusing to speak Hebrew and reversing the terminology of the Zionist discourse, and on the other hand through destabilising the Zionist discourse not by rejecting it altogether, substituting it with an alternative (Palestinian) discourse, but by drawing attention to its internal contradictions.

Conclusion

While much of the debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is governed by a nationalist discourse, postcolonial perspectives bring to the fore a critique of Zionism as colonialism. Such a critique has unpacked, amongst other things, the ways in which Zionism appropriated Orientalist (and neo-Orientalist) discourses of modernization. This has had the greatest implications in 'proper Israel' and in relation to the Palestinian citizens; for it is in proper Israel, or historic Palestine, where most processes of 'creative destruction' take place and where Israeli colonialism has invested in the production of 'colonised subjects'. The ambivalence of the Zionist discourse, its doublethink, and the effects these processes had over the years transformed the Palestinian community in Israel, yet in diverse and uneven ways.

The dynamic process that the Palestinian community in Israel has gone through over the past sixty-two years, has led to greater political mobilization, in which articulating national Palestinian agendas is no longer feared, as well as leading to greater cultural hybridity, especially of the younger generations. Within this context, questions of belonging and identity become acute and scholars are divided about the patterns that characterize the dynamics within the Palestinian society in Israel. Palestinian political activism and cultural production in Israel over the years reflect, if nothing else, the diversity of positions that Palestinian citizens of Israel take to their negotiations with Zionism. This political activism includes agendas that tackle issues of modernity and orientalism, as well as agendas that deal with the national conflict, ranging from standpoints that accept the Zionist framework to those that seek to undermine it or reject it altogether.

Palestinian filmmakers in Israel, as I will discuss in the next chapter, produce their films within and in relation to this context; the films often deal with the particular experiences of Israeli colonialism (like the processes of 'creative destruction' of Palestinian spaces and culture within proper Israel) and engage with Zionism's Orientalist discourse of modernization. These films, as sites of enunciation, which participate in the contemporary discursive 'climate' in Israel/Palestine, and their strategies of production, emerge from diverse political standpoints. The young Palestinian filmmakers addressed by this thesis belong to a generation that is hybrid in many ways, and their films and strategies of production are informed by, and reflective of, the recent socio-political shifts I described in this chapter. Much of the political socialization of individuals (including the filmmakers I interviewed for this research) depends on agents such as family, the local community, schools and universities and affiliation with the different political streams, and this diversity is also reflected in the films. Critical analysis of the films from a postcolonial perspective therefore allows a more inclusive approach, which addresses the films that engage with the discourse of Palestinian national resistance, the films that emphasise experiences of ambivalence and 'in-betweenness' and films which focus on issues of modernity and tradition outside of the prism of the national.

Chapter 2

Context of Production: The Israeli Industry

As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the contexts of production within which Palestinian filmmakers work - inside and outside of Israel - are hybrid, unstable and diverse. Filmmakers often work in between the Palestinian Authority, the West, Israel and other Arab countries (Khleifi, 2001:187). Inside Israel, Palestinian films started to be made from the mid-1980s onwards. With the emergence of New Palestinian Cinema in the 1990s, films by Palestinian citizens of Israel are now also produced within the Israeli industry. This chapter aims to chart the development of Palestinian filmmaking in Israel and to explain the structural conditions and the discursive environment within which Palestinian filmmakers produce their work.

My guiding rationale here is that Palestinian filmmaking in Israel should also be seen against the background of the history of Israeli cinema and television industries, their structure and modes of production. I consider here both the formal aspects of these industries - the laws and regulations, mechanisms of funding and the infrastructure of production, distribution and exhibition - and the informal characteristics, such as the dominant discourse. These aspects determine the spectrum of possibilities for Palestinian film production and inform the strategies that Palestinian filmmakers choose to adopt. The primary material I have used to illustrate the context of production includes official documents (such as laws regulations and policies related to the development of Film and Television in Israel); reviews and newspaper articles about Palestinian films in Israel; archival research at the Israeli Film Archive, the Israeli Broadcast Authority and the Israeli-Arab press archive in the Givat Haviva Institute and interviews with relevant personnel within the Film and Television industries.

The documents studied included official documents open to the public and internal documents of different cinema organisations to which I was given access. I studied about 50 documents, which included laws and regulations, catalogues, policy papers, protocols, production files, internal correspondence and minutes of meetings.

However, neither the access to nor the nature of the documents that I was able to study were consistent. For example, the New Foundation for Cinema and Television allowed access to all its production files (which included original scripts and treatments, budgets and correspondence regarding the different films) together with internal documents regarding calls for proposals, lists of applications and minutes of meetings of various selection committees. The Israeli Film Fund on the other hand provided lists of films that were produced by the fund and general data about budget allocation but not details of unsuccessful applications or any production files. The Gesher Fund provided access to documents regarding the general policies and schemes that the fund operates but not of individual films, the Rabinowitz and Makor film funds refused me access to any documents beyond their catalogue and advertising material.

In addition, I looked at over 100 reviews and articles in the Israeli press. The vast majority of these were in the Hebrew press. My research in the Arabic press archive in 2005 showed that there were very few articles about Palestinian cinema in Israel (or “cinema of Israeli-Arabs” as it was catalogued by the archive). This was another indication of the limited interest in, and scope of, local cinema production amongst Palestinians in Israel. However, with the growing initiatives to foster film culture since, more articles may have been published.

Finally, I interviewed the directors of the major film funds, key television commissioning editors and other media and film professionals who were involved with Palestinian filmmaking (Israeli Jews and Palestinians). A detailed list of my interviews is submitted as appendix 1. The interviews I conducted were pivotal in obtaining data which could not be gleaned from documents and more importantly, in allowing me to understand in greater depth the discursive environment: how the regulations and policies are usually being interpreted and implemented, and what are the perceptions of functionaries in the cinema and television industries regarding Palestinian filmmaking. Attention to this discursive environment is important since, as I discussed in chapter one, there is a gap between the declarative level, in which Palestinian are said to enjoy equality of rights, and the *de facto* level, in which Palestinians are excluded from the

Israeli collective. My discussion in the following pages is largely based on these primary sources. Most of these are in Hebrew. The following quotes from documents, interviews, reviews and articles are my translations.

Palestinian films in Israel: 1948-1990s

There is no evidence to suggest that Palestinian films were produced inside Israel (or in the West Bank and Gaza Strip) before the early 1980s. A film industry has existed in Israel since 1948 but it has been marginal and relatively small for many years, especially when compared with other cultural industries, such as theatre. State support for film production has been minimal and the business of cinema was hardly viable commercially. While some periods were better than others, generally Israeli films have always had to struggle to make profit. Israeli cinema was equally slow to gain visibility in academia as a viable field of academic research (Zimmerman, 2003).

The first Act of Parliament in relation to cinema production in Israel was the Encouragement of Israeli Film Law in 1954, which came into being primarily to satisfy the need to regulate the commercial aspects of the industry. The law, coupled with a tax return policy existing since the 1960s, facilitated the development of commercial cinema and paved the way for the temporal success of popular genres such as the 'Bourekas' films.³⁷ However, government support of non-commercial films - or what is locally dubbed as 'quality films' - was limited. Small award schemes and scholarships were initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture solely for completed films and no funds were available for film projects in development or production (Shohat, 1989a). Palestinian citizens, who were under the rule of a military government and in a state of economic and social disarray, were for the most part prevented from taking part in the production of cinema, inside or outside of the relatively small Israeli industry.

³⁷ This was the title of the dominant genre in popular Israeli cinema during the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s Israeli commercial cinema has declined sharply due to changes in the tax return policy and the emergence of VCRs and cable television. Private investors lost interest and the two major commercial film producers, Menachem Golan and Yoram Globus, who also controlled the lion's share of the distribution and exhibition market, moved their production companies to Hollywood. As a result, the popular "Bourekas" genre disappeared (Shohat, 1989a).

In addition, Palestinians were hardly ever represented on the cinema screen. As in many countries, Hollywood films dominated the market in Israel and were popular amongst Jews and Palestinians alike. Screenings of American and European films were held in parts of the Palestinians towns and villages during the period of the military government and throughout the 1960s and 1970s and a number of Palestinian film theatres operated in Nazareth, in Acre and in some of the villages in the Galilee. In this respect, the enchanting stars of Hollywood cinema were part of the imaginative world of Palestinian children in the villages of the Galilee, perhaps in a similar way to that of the Jewish children in Tel-Aviv. As some of the filmmakers that belong to this generation - Kasam Sha'aban, Ali Nassar and Salim Dau and Mohammad Bakri - described to me, in the villages that they grew up in there were two places for cultural consumption for the young men: the ICP or the cinemas. For example, Salim Dau, a renowned Palestinian actor in Israel and a filmmaker, told how impressed he was as a child by Hollywood films like *Samson and Delilah* (DeMille, 1949) and how influential these films were in his decision to become an actor.³⁸ Dau also mentioned that while the cinemas in the Palestinian towns featured mainly Western films, they also screened Egyptian and Indian films, which were very popular amongst Palestinian audiences. These films were also popular amongst Arab Jews and used to be screened in the development towns that are located on the periphery (both in terms of geography and culture) of Israel.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, the political mobilization of young Palestinians in the 1970s fostered prolific cultural production inside Israel (prominently in literature and poetry, but also in theatre and music), which played a significant role in the articulation of a Palestinian national identity and a political agenda for Palestinians in Israel. Around the same time, the Israeli film industry started to change as a number of public institutions that were founded improved the status of Israeli cinema and strengthened its infrastructure. These included the cinemateques in Haifa, Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, the Israeli Cinema Institute, the first two film schools in Tel Aviv and the

³⁸ Interview, Wadi Nisnas, Haifa, 31.3.2005

Fund for the Encouragement of Original Quality Films.³⁹ Yet, neither the improvements in the film industry in the 1970s nor the political mobilization within the Palestinian community had much effect on Palestinian filmmaking inside Israel during that time.

Television broadcasts in Israel began in 1968, when the Israeli Broadcast Authority (IBA) launched its television Channel 1 (which remained the only television channel in Israel until 1992). The IBA law of 1965 obliged both radio and television broadcasters to show a prescribed amount of their broadcasts in Arabic. Thus, television broadcasts in Arabic were produced as soon as Israeli television aired its first programmes. IBA radio broadcasts in Arabic existed since the early 1950s, the television broadcasts in Arabic which started shortly after the 1967 war were seen initially as an extension of the propaganda radio broadcasts that the IBA ran during and shortly after the war, which were at the time directed both at the Arabs inside Israel and in the newly occupied territories (the West Banks, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights) without distinction. However, these propaganda broadcasts soon gave rise to a special Arabic television division of the IBA, which in its heyday (around the 1970s and the early 1980s) produced a rich variety of programmes in Arabic including documentaries, comedies, factual programmes and drama. Yet, as Roge Tavor, who was the head of the Arabic division at the time, claims “in the mind of the producers at the time was the Arabic speaking population of Israel, not necessarily the Palestinian citizens, and there was certainly no intention of letting Arab citizens be involved in the production”.⁴⁰ Indeed over the years, as with the IBA radio, the majority of programme-makers were Arab-speaking Jews (primarily Iraqi Jews) rather than Palestinians. In the early 1980s the situation improved slightly, but the few individuals who were working for the IBA were mostly confined to the roles of presenters rather than producers, directors, or content editors.

³⁹ The Fund for the Encouragement of Original Quality Films (later to be renamed the Israeli Film Fund) was established in 1978, after a long campaign led by filmmakers and producers. The fund provided for the first time public funding for independent films at the production and development stages. While many expected that this would improve cinema production considerably, in reality the fund supported only a few films its first decade (Shohat, 1989).

⁴⁰ Roge Tavor, interview, 12. 7. 2005, Vered Ha'Galil,

Importantly, the programmes that the Arabic broadcast division of IBA produced, however interesting they may have been, avoided politics altogether.⁴¹ Typical programming covered such topics as medicine, farming, science, poetry, art and literature, and as Tavor explains: “the producers attempted to create content that would be relevant to the Arab community and were encouraged to do so by the IBA, as long as they avoided dealing with political issues and promoted a message of co-existence and peace”.⁴² Many of the programmes, particularly in light of the then recent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, focused on depicting differences between the Palestinian community inside Israel and the Palestinian population across the 1967 border. Reflecting the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity, these programmes highlighted gaps in modernization between the communities and emphasized the welfare of Arabs inside Israel who, unlike their fellow Palestinians across the Green Line, benefited from advanced farming technologies, organised and modern health services, education and so on. The schedule of broadcasts also included outsourced programmes in Arabic. Especially popular was the ‘Arab Film’ slot on Friday afternoons, when an Egyptian film – often melodrama or musical – was shown.⁴³

The broadcasts in Arabic were scheduled daily between 5pm and 8pm and ran for longer on Saturdays. The nature and level of reception of these programmes amongst the Palestinians in Israel is open to debate.⁴⁴ However, whether the IBA broadcasts in Arabic in the first few decades were popular or not, a level of mistrust of the IBA has

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ These Arab films were not only popular among Palestinians. The family ritual of gathering around the television on Friday evenings to watch the Arab film forms part of the childhood memory of many Israelis, including my own. Through these films we became familiarised with Egyptian stars like UM Kultum and Adel Imam.

⁴⁴ Viewing surveys taken over the years often suggested that they enjoyed great popularity. For example, a survey from the 1980s suggested that IBA broadcasts were watched by 80% of the population (Tavor, 2001). Yet, a report by the Palestinian NGO I’lam (2001) points out that a closer study reveals that the answers that were given in those surveys were unreliable, as they reflect mainly the fear mentality and the tendency of the first generation of Palestinian citizens to keep quiet. I’lam’s report quotes one example that demonstrates the unreliability of these surveys: a 1968 viewing survey that the media professor Elihu Katz, then acting as the head of the founding team of Israeli television, conducted amongst the Palestinian population. Katz included in his questionnaire questions about programmes that were never aired. The results showed that the invented programmes were as popular as the real ones and that viewers found them as compelling.

always existed as it was commonly regarded as an agent of the government even if these views were not openly expressed. These feelings of mistrust have only intensified with the passage of time.

Early beginnings: the 1980s

Michel Khleifi

As I noted in the introduction, most scholars of Palestinian cinema identify that the early films of Michel Khleifi anticipated a shift in the mode of Palestinian cinema from exile to historic Palestine and from militant to individualistic cinema (Shafik, 2001; Khleifi, 2001; Alexander 2005; Gertz and Khleifi, 2004; Shohat, 1988; Massad, 2006). While Khleifi has never worked within the Israeli film industry the issues raised in his films, which are concerned specifically with the representation of the Palestinian community in Israel, as well as the mode of production which he adopted form an important reference point for my study of Palestinian filmmaking in Israel. I will therefore elaborate on his early works here before returning to discuss the context of production within Israel.

Khleifi was born in Nazareth in 1950 and grew up under the Military Government. In 1970, Khleifi traveled to Belgium to study theatre and television, and has subsequently established himself as an independent filmmaker in Europe. *Fertile Memory* (1980), Khleifi's first documentary, broke new ground on a number of levels. It was the first film to point the camera at 'ordinary people' and the first film to deal specifically with the Palestinians inside Israel. Relating the parallel stories of a Palestinian women from Israel the West Bank, the film, as Ella Shohat (1988) argued "the film refuses to separate the 'internal' from the 'external' problems" (44).⁴⁵ By focusing not merely on 'ordinary people' but on female protagonists, Khleifi pinpoints the intersection of gender and

⁴⁵ The film tells the stories of two Palestinian women: an old widow from Yfia, a village in the Galilee (within Israel), a factory worker struggling to provide for her two children, and the young Sahar Khalifeh from the West Bank, who decided to divorce her husband and embark on an independent career as a novelist (which she later manages successfully).

colonial oppression, which has not only been depicted by many Palestinian films since, but has also become a central topic in the contemporary Palestinian national discourse.

Aesthetically, as Shafik (2001) notes, *Fertile Memory* is “artistically and technically more advanced” than the revolutionary PLO films (523). It breaks with the militant aesthetic of Third Cinema by constituting a lyrical and an intimate voice. Rather than placing cinema at the service of the national revolution, as the Palestinian Film Group aspired to do, for example, Khleifi asserts a much more complex relationship between cultural production and politics. This marks the beginning of a Palestinian cinema that scrutinizes Palestinian society itself as much as it criticizes its Zionist oppressor. The tensions that arise from this dual engagement – dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while at the same time drawing attention to internal conflicts – is central to many contemporary Palestinian films.

Khleifi’s first feature film *Wedding in the Galilee* (1987), a European co-production, was the first Palestinian film to receive international attention.⁴⁶ *Wedding in the Galilee* positioned Khleifi as the most prominent Palestinian director and the film has continued to receive academic attention since its release. In a similar vein to *Fertile Memory*, *Wedding in the Galilee* interweaves women’s and national liberation, offering a vision of a political solution in which feminine attributes of compassion and negotiation serve as the motivating force for peace.⁴⁷ Importantly, gaining international exposure the film was pivotal in contesting the stereotypical representation of Palestinians in Israeli and Western media. Shohat (1988) has argued that through the positive depiction of Palestinian villagers’ costumes, traditions and historical connection to their land, the film reversed dominant cinematic portrayals of the conflict. Rather than the dominant images of peace-seeking Israelis whose lives are intruded upon by Palestinian terrorists,

⁴⁶ *Wedding in the Galilee* won a number of prestigious awards of which worth mentioning are: The Cannes Film Festival International Federation of Film Critic Awards, 1987; the San Sebastian Grand Prize 1987; the Best Belgian Film 1988. It was extremely successful in its screenings in Cairo Film Festival and was later screened in Israel. For many years it has been the most famous Palestinian film and has generated a great number of reviews and academic writing.

⁴⁷ The relationships between gender and nation in *Wedding* have been examined in several academic texts and I will refer to it in more detail in chapter seven (Shohat, 1988; Gertz, 2001; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008; Yacub, 2007; Salti, 2010; Ball, 2008; Kennedy, 2006).

the film shows that it is Palestinian-rooted life in Palestine that was interrupted by the Zionist arrival in the region (Ibid.). An important aspect of the film's depiction of the conflict is the very focus of the film on the life of Palestinian citizens of Israel under the Military Government. By so doing, the film, like *Fertile Memory* and unlike previous Palestinian films, incorporates the Palestinians in Israel into the overall Palestinian experience of exile and occupation and asserts a unified national identity.⁴⁸

Along with the stylistic, ideological and thematic new ground that Khleifi's films broke, his work also signposted an important shift in the mode of production of Palestinian films. According to Naficy (2001), Khleifi's films exemplify the 'interstitial' mode of production, which is one of the prominent modes of accented and exilic films.⁴⁹ Naficy defined this as a mode of production which, rather than being marginal (to society and the film industry) and thus excluded from its beneficiaries, works "between the cracks" of the post-industrial mode of film production in Western film industries. This post-industrial mode of production, which developed in the 1970s, is characterized by decentralization and diversity of sources of funding as well as distribution and exhibition outlets.⁵⁰ According to Naficy, in this environment of late-capitalism, rather than the centralized studio system, pockets of alternative film practice were able to operate. Khleifi's mode of production in *Wedding in the Galilee* demonstrated the ways in which ethnic and exilic filmmakers were operating instrumentally on the

⁴⁸ *Wedding in the Galilee*, as Shohat (1988) points out, is primarily engaged with drawing links between the experiences of the Palestinians in Israel and those of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Khleifi draws those links by obscuring the temporality of the film. On the one hand, he sets the story in the time of the Military Government, which historically ended in 1966. On the other, visual clues relating to the time of film's production (the later 1980s) are given at various points in the film. This temporal ambiguity links, according to Shohat, the experiences of the Palestinians in Israel with the Palestinians across the Green Line, who were still under military governance in the 1980s. For detailed analyses see: Shohat, 1988; Gertz and Khleifi, 2008.

⁴⁹ Naficy identifies two phases of accented filmmakers. The first phase was typified by the group of filmmakers arriving to the West following the process of decolonization in the Third World, during the 1950s to the 1970s, and formed part of a Third Cinema framework. The second group emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the failure of nationalism, socialism and communism and the ruptures caused by the emergence postindustrial global economies (11). Each group/phase is also characterised by a different mode of production, while the first opted towards collective mode of production the later is characterised by the interstitial mode.

⁵⁰ These include the proliferation of film festivals, the emergence of niche small distribution companies, the growing academic or educational market for films, the entrance of international cable broadcasters - such as Sundance, Cannal +, ZDF and Arte - as potential commissioners and exhibitor of 'quality' films and small scale digital technology that enables cheaper production.

intersections of the Western post-industrial system. Characteristically, Khleifi had a multi-functional role; he wrote, directed and produced the film. The fundraising process illustrates what Naficy means by 'working between the cracks', as Khleifi raised the money by mobilizing different European public funds, which, in seeking to compete with the American industry, fostered models of European co-productions.⁵¹ Additional characteristics of the interstitial mode of production include multilingualism (which at times exists in the film text itself, but often forms an important part of the production that relies on a transnational crew); complex political constraints that influence the production; unstable production schedules and finally, ambiguity with regard to distribution and publicity of the films. The latter is often manifested in disputes and debates around the national categorization of Accented films for the purpose of marketing and/or exhibition.

Al Jadid

While Khleifi, who moved to work outside of Israel, received considerable attention, the early 1980s also saw the beginnings of Palestinian filmmaking inside Israel but these were seldom noted in chronologies of Palestinian cinema. The first attempt to produce Palestinian films inside Israel was under the auspices of the Israeli Communist Party (ICP). As I discussed in chapter one, during the 1970s and the early 1980s the ICP was the most significant political and cultural force amongst Palestinians in Israel. Its literary society *Al-Jadid*, which was a centre for politically conscious cultural production, resolved to expand its activity to include cinema. In the late 1970s, with the encouragement of leading figures such as the writers Emile Habibi and Salman Natur, a number of young party members were granted scholarships to study cinema in the

⁵¹ Khleifi formed his own production company, which invested in the film, and the film was finally financed by an assemblage of various sources: Le Societe MARISA film, Brussels; Q.A Production, London; ZDF television Germany; the Belgian Ministry of the French community; the French La Societe des Productions Audiovisuelles; Avidia Films; Canal + TV; Lasa Films (distributor) and the French Ministry of Culture (Naficy, 2001: 249).

Soviet Union. Ali Nassar was sent to study in Moscow and Kasam Sha'aban and Nazim Shreidi in Prague. On their return to Israel in 1983 the group established the *Al Jadid committee for Cinema*. As reported in the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, the committee set out to "promote the Arab film in Israel" and sought to establish production units and distribution networks across Israel.⁵² However, funds from the party were limited and the infrastructure available for production was minimal. The central party in the Soviet Union donated an old camera, some sound equipment and lighting kit. Editing facilities were not available and editing was therefore only possible at one of the independent post-production companies in Tel-Aviv.⁵³

The *Al Jadid* committee produced two documentary films in 1984. *A Story of a Beach-Town*, a 50-minute documentary directed by Ali Nassar, about the history of the Palestinian residents of Jaffa, and *Nazareth '84* directed by Kasam Sha'aban, a 40-minute documentary that follows Jewish and Arab participants in a bi-national summer camp organised by the municipality of Nazareth.⁵⁴ *Nazareth '84*, said Natur to the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv*, shows "the friendly relationships which developed between the Jews and the Arabs as they engage with renovation works in the city".⁵⁵ The films were screened to Palestinian audiences at *Al- Khawatti*, the Arab-Palestinian theatre in Jerusalem, and in several other special screenings in Arab towns and villages across Israel.

Although the films produced by *Al Jadid* differed from the revolutionary films of the PLO units in their tone and subject matter, the committee members strove to place their films in the service of the political struggle. According to Salman Natur :

⁵² Ilana Baum. (14. 3.1985) *Ma'ariv*.

⁵³ Interview, Daliat el-Carmel, 27.6.05 Natur, a Palestinian -Druze and a well-known journalist, was the head of the *Al Jadid* literary Magazine of *Al-Itihad* (the ICP newspaper) and initiator of the *Al Jadid Cinema Committee*, which included filmmakers, writers and journalists.

⁵⁴ As Sha'aban said in interview to the local *Haifa*, the film's budget was 12,000 USD and was funded by Sha'aban's brother, who sold his car in order to pay for it. Ora Brafman "Interview with Kasam Sha'aban" *Haifa* 5.12.1986

⁵⁵ Ilana Baum. (14. 3.1985) *Ma'ariv*.

Working through the ICP was the only way at the time if one wanted to produce culture which was politically conscious ...using the terms of those times, we wanted to establish a progressive Palestinian cinema ...we wanted to produce a cinema that was committed to the national cause and the end of the occupation... in the spirit of progressivism we wanted to represent the Palestinian community here (in Israel). When we filmed the summer camp in Nazareth it was a national-patriotic event. It was progressive in the sense that there were Jews there as well⁵⁶.

The members of *Al Jadid* were also looking to work in collaboration with the film units of the PLO. Despite the Israeli prohibition on associating with PLO members at the time - imposed on all Israeli citizens - the group members met with members of the PLO Film Unit in Europe. In 1985 Ali Nassar's film *A Story of a Beach-Town* was screened at the Leipzig Film Festival. The festival provided the *Al-Jadid* members with an opportunity to meet with the PLO filmmakers whose films were also showcased. They sold them a copy of the film and talked about future cooperation. A few months later Natur met with Mahmood Tawfik (one of the PLO filmmakers) for the second time in Athens and a plan for cooperation was drawn up in greater detail⁵⁷.

However, *Al Jadid's* activity waned and the group ceased to exist before it managed to materialize those plans. According to Natur, it was a combination of external factors that brought *Al-Jadid* to its end rather than a conscious decision on his part to end the group's activity. These factors were mainly related to the gradual decline of the Soviet Union and with it the power of the ICP, and to the leadership crisis in the ICP following the deaths of its two central figures Emile Habibi and Emile Tuma. Ultimately, *Al Jadid* was left with no financial support to produce films.

Palestinian films in Israel since the 1990s

⁵⁶ Interview, Daliat el-Carmel, 27.6.05

⁵⁷ Ibid.

With the emergence of New Palestinian cinema in the 1990s, production of Palestinian films inside Israel has also increased, although given the ratio of the Palestinian citizens to the overall population these are still significantly marginal. As I noted in the introduction, the emergence of those films in the 1990s, and their subsequent proliferation, was informed by the political changes inside and outside Israel. The establishment of the PA, the increase in political mobilization of Palestinians in Israel, the social characteristics of the younger generations of Palestinians in Israel, the *Al-Aksa* Intifada and the events of October 2000 have all contributed to this increase in filmmaking.

Yet, no less significant is the contribution of transformations within the Israeli film and television industries themselves since the 1990s, which have created new funding and distribution opportunities for Palestinian filmmakers and enabled filmmakers to adopt an 'interstitial' mode of production – to use Naficy's term – not only in relation to Western film industries but also in relation to the Israeli industry. In the following pages I will first discuss the developments in the Israeli film and TV industries since the 1990s and the particular ways in which these influenced the making of Palestinian films in Israel. Then, based on the interviews I conducted with television commissioning editors, directors of film funds and producers, I will attempt to outline the discursive environment in the film and television industry.

The Israeli Film Industry

The 1990s saw several important developments in the Israeli film industry and the past decade has seen an unprecedented boom in Israeli cinema. An increase in public funding since the 1990s and the implementation of a new Cinema Law have contributed to the growth and to the success of Israeli films both at home and abroad.

The activity of the Israeli Film Fund increased. From an original production rate of five films per year it currently supports an average of ten to fifteen. In addition, new film funds were established that extended the possibilities for public funding of cinema and broadened the scope of funding to include documentaries, experimental and short films.

These film funds include the Cinema Project of the Rabinowitz Tel Aviv Foundation for the Arts and the Recanati Foundation (commonly known as the Rabinowitz Fund), which was established in 1988 and is currently a major funder of Israeli cinema. Between 1988 and 2005 the Rabinowitz fund supported 427 films, which include documentaries, fiction, experimental and short films. Another important funder is the New Foundation for Cinema and Television. Established in 1993 by the Art and Culture Council, it focuses primarily on documentary and experimental films. About 200 films have been produced with its assistance since the foundation's establishment, and it has become pivotal to the promotion of the independent documentary in Israel. Additional funders are the Makor Foundation for Israeli Films, founded in 1996 by the Cable TV & Satellite Council (CTSC), and the Gesher Multicultural Film Fund founded in 2001 by the Gesher Foundation, a well-established religious educational organisation that is partly state-funded, with a particular agenda of multiculturalism coupled with the strengthening of the Jewish-Israeli identity.

In addition to the new funding bodies, the new Cinema Law, introduced in 1999, considerably altered the conditions of cinema production in Israel. Unlike the Encouragement of Israeli Film Law from 1954, the new law was a much more extensive piece of legislation that moved beyond the business aspects of a commercial film industry and set out to define the attributes of Israeli cinema as a national and cultural industry. The law ensures an increase in the level of public funding for cinema and sets guidelines and regulations for the allocation of public funds. Following models of European national cinemas, the new law defines a film as Israeli primarily according to the identity of the production team, the main language of the film and allocation of its budgets. Thus, to qualify as an Israeli film the primary language of the film should be Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish or Ladino (both Jewish dialects); one of the primary production team (director, producer, DOP or scriptwriter) must be an Israeli resident and at least 50% of the budget of the film should be spent on services, goods and salaries within Israel. Set against a state of affairs in which Israeli cinema was hitherto primarily associated with the hegemonic Ashkenazi-Jewish culture, both in terms of production processes and of the images produced, the new law sought to address the under-

represented and the misrepresented. The law defines commitment to represent Israeli culture in all its diversity as one of the primary objectives of Israeli cinema. To ensure that the spirit of the law will be implemented accurately the law appointed an advisory body, the Cinema Council, whose key role is defined as “encouraging and supporting production of Israeli cinema while ensuring the expression of the diverse cultures, values and worldviews that exist in Israeli society”.

The increase in state and public funding has resulted in a significant growth in the number of films that were produced in Israel in recent years. The new regulations meant that the funding bodies have now to demonstrate an interest in funding or supporting projects which address diversity, as this became a criterion for the allocation of state funds by the Cinema Council. As discussed in chapter one, in the Israeli political discourse diversity (or multiculturalism) is commonly understood as referring to the communities, or the ‘sectors’, that are peripheral to the hegemonic Ashkenazi-Jewish secular ‘centre’ (which is also associated with, and often referred to as, ‘the establishment’). Thus, the diverse cultures and worldviews to which the law refers typically include the Jewish religious communities, the *Mizrahim* (Arab Jews), recent immigrant communities (such as the Russian and Ethiopian immigrants of the 1990s), Women, Gay and Lesbian groups and the ‘Israeli-Arabs’ (the Palestinian citizens). In the contexts of production existing since the 1990s, when an interest in representing the Arab-Palestinian community in Israel became part of the funding bodies’ charter, the efforts of Palestinian filmmakers in Israel began to be recognised and endorsed.

Since the early 1990s the various Israeli film funds have supported Palestinian directors in the making of some six feature-length fiction films, about twenty documentaries, approximately five short films and several student projects.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ In addition, as I noted in the introduction and explain in the following pages, additional films by Palestinian citizens of Israel were produced since the 1990s which were not funded by the Israeli funds and broadcasters. These were funded by alternative sources such as NGOs or non-Israeli funds.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Rabinowitz Fund supported the Gaza-born filmmaker Rashid Mashrawi in making the short dramas *The Shelter* (1990) and *The Magician* (1991). It later supported the documentaries *Keys* (2003) by Salim Dau and *1948* (1999) by Mohammad Bakri, as well as Ibtisam Mara'ana's documentaries *Paradise Lost* (2002) and *Badal* (2004). It funded Tawfik abu Wael's acclaimed feature *Thirst* (2003), and is currently supporting three projects in various stages of production: Tawfik Abu Wael's new film *Tanafur* (working title), Sameh Zoabi's *Jameia ' A man with a mobile phone'* (working title) and a documentary by Amduh Afadila *Janoun* (working title) about mysticism and traditions.

The first Palestinian film that was supported by the Israeli Film Fund was Elia Suleiman's first feature, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* in 1995. Ali Nassar, who since the episode of *Al-Jadid* was struggling to raise funds for his films, finally managed to garner support from the Israeli Film Fund for his two features *The Milky Way* (1996) and *In The Ninth Month* (2002), and his latest project *Waiting for Salah al-Dean*, which is currently in post-production, was also supported by the IFF. Recently, the IFF supported the production of *Ajami* (2009), which was initiated by the Palestinian Jaffa-based filmmaker Scandar Copti and co-directed with the Jewish-Israeli filmmaker, Yaron Shani.

The New Foundation for Cinema and Television, whose main focus is documentary, supported the production of Nizar Hassan's documentaries *Yasmin* (1996), *Legend* (1998) and *Cut* (2000); Suha Arref's documentaries *Good Morning Jerusalem* (2004) and *Hardball* (2006); Ibtisam Mar'ana's *Al-Jiser* (2005) and *Three Times Divorced* (2007); Jony Arbid's drama *Ringo and Taher* (2006); Juliano Mer-Hamis *Arna's Children* (2003); Rokaya Sabbah's *On Hold* (2007); Basel Tannous's *Arus Eljalil* (2006), Kamil Sharif's *Abed Doesn't Want to Be a Scout* (2007); Ramez Kazmouz's *Nazek* (2008). It has also participated in the budgets of Mohammad Bakri's *1948* (1999) and *Since You've Left* (2005) and Rima Essa's *My Name is Ahlam* (2008). Several other projects are in various stages of development and production.

The Makor foundation did not support any Palestinian filmmakers until 2007 when it supported Ibtisam Mara'ana's documentaries *Lady Kul-el-Arab* (2007), and *77 Steps* (2010) as well as Bilal Yousef's documentary *Crossing Borders* (2007). The Gesher fund, whose specific agenda is promoting multiculturalism, only supported a few Palestinian films. It participated in the production of Bilal Yousef's *Crossing Borders* (2007), and supported Ala Khlikhal's short experimental *Le'patei Hummus Kadima* (2006).⁵⁹ The emphasis of this fund is mainly on setting up training schemes and development funds. It supported a number of experimental short projects and student films and has recently set up two special schemes that address Palestinian-Israeli filmmakers specifically. One of the projects *Land* was made in collaboration with the Rabinowitz fund, the Television channel 8 and film schools in Emeq Ha'Yarden and Almanar Colleges. The project funds selected Arab students' films dealing with the topic of land and secures their broadcast on channel 8. The second project, which is entitled *Dialogue*, addresses young Jewish and Arab filmmakers who took part in a special workshop for multicultural filmmaking. The project has been designed to encourage collaboration between Jewish and Arab filmmakers.⁶⁰

The Television Industry

The television industry in Israel has also gone through significant transformation since the early 1990s, moving from a monopoly of a single public service channel to a multi-channel commercial television. In the commercial multi-channel environment, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (which currently operates a number of public service channels in addition to channel 1) is in a state of crisis both in terms of finance and in terms of its identity. In recent years it came under severe public attack; its broadcasts are often seen as irrelevant and archaic and the public service it provides is deemed inadequate. According to Itai Lanzberg, the Head of Documentary Programmes in Channel 1 since 2003, part of the problem is related to the fact that IBA is still manipulated by politics (despite being supposedly 'public' rather than 'governmental',

⁵⁹ Khlikhal's 5-minute film was not translated to English.

⁶⁰ So far three films received funding for production, two of which were by Palestinian directors and the third, a co-direction by a Palestinian and a Jewish director.

interference by ministers and MPs with the agenda of the IBA is still commonplace) and also to the fact that the IBA charter has not been reviewed since its establishment in 1968. Reflecting the spirit of the time, the IBA law from 1965 defines the objectives of the Israeli public television only in relation to the Jewish majority. These include fostering good citizenship, reinforcing Jewish heritage and reflecting Jewish life in the Diaspora. As a result, argues Lanzberg, “there is no real sense of the ethical code of the channel or any social principles to guide the programme-makers”.⁶¹

Moreover, the investment by the IBA in original production has declined sharply in recent years. Very few documentaries have been commissioned and almost no Palestinian (or Israeli Arab as they would be called by the IBA) documentaries were produced. Despite the obligation it has to broadcast in Arabic, the service it provides for the Palestinian population fails to meet the requirements of the law. The Arab division of the IBA still exists but its rate of production is extremely limited.⁶² The number of Palestinians who work in different capacities in IBA is still very small, and the popularity of the IBA channels amongst Palestinians viewers is in rapid decline.⁶³ The IBA is, as a result, almost irrelevant to the production of Palestinian films in Israel.

The expansion of television since the 1990s involved the establishment of two additional authorities: the Second Broadcast Authority for Television and Radio (SBA) and The Council for Cable TV and Satellite Broadcasting (CTSC), which operate and regulate commercial broadcasts. Although commercial, the SBA and CTSC are also obliged by law to ensure that a proportion of their broadcasts fulfil a ‘public service’ role, inasmuch as they should address and represent cultural diversity and minority groups within Israeli society. The proliferation of channels and the requirements of the new regulatory bodies (SBA and CTSC) gave rise to additional sources of funding and exhibition for Palestinian films.

⁶¹ Itai Lanzberg, interview, Shoham, 9. 4. 2005.

⁶² For example, a report made in 2001 suggested that only 9.4% of broadcasts were in Arabic, a substantial part of which were not original productions. Substantially fewer broadcasts in Arabic are transmitted on IBA’s other channels (Channel 33 and the Education TV) (Tavor, 2001; Zaida, 2001).

⁶³ For example, according to figures given by the IBA chairman addressing a public meeting in 2001, only about 1.5% of Palestinian households watched the IBA broadcasts in Arabic during that year (Zaida, 2001)

The Second Broadcast Authority for Television and Radio (SBA) was formed in 1992 when it launched the first partly commercial Channel 2, and the fully commercial channel 10 in 2002. The legislator obliged the SBA to demonstrate that its public service broadcasts include a certain degree of original Israeli productions and that these represent the diversity of cultures and worldviews that exist in Israeli society today. Thus, as with the cinema council, Channel 2 television has an interest and an obligation to address diversity.

The SBA commissioned several documentaries by Palestinian directors and produced a number of films about the Palestinian community as part of the requirement to include 20% of public service broadcasts in their programming.⁶⁴ Yet, its investment in Palestinian filmmakers falls far short of meeting the needs of this community, as do its broadcasts in Arabic, which form part of the SBA public service broadcasts the channel is required to deliver. For example, of the 178 films that were produced by the SBA between 1999 and 2003, only three were made by Palestinian directors.⁶⁵ The SBA does not monitor its investment in films of and about the Palestinian community on a regular basis, although an internal document from 2004 (that I was given access to by the head of the Production and Funding Department in the SBA) gives some indication of the level of investment made during that year. The report, which was addressed to the television management of the SBA, was composed in response to a query that was submitted by the Palestinian NGO *Musawa* in relation to programming in Arabic of and about the Palestinian community in Israel. According to the report, in 2004 the SBA supported 13 films about the “Arab sector”, two of which were directed by an “Arab filmmaker”.⁶⁶ Seeking to explain the low rate of production the report states that

⁶⁴ 80% of the broadcasts of channel 2 are commercial and produced by a number of franchisees, currently the production companies *Keshet* and *Telad*, the remaining 20% of the broadcasts of Channel 2 are run by the SBA itself as the channel’s public service broadcasts

⁶⁵ As stated in the SBA 2003 production catalogue.

⁶⁶ The report suggests that out of the seven calls for proposals (or: tenders for documentaries) that the SBA published in 2004 inviting treatments about set topics, only three were published in Arabic in Arab newspapers. These were calls for treatments on the topics of ‘peripheries and settlements’, ‘education’ and ‘children’. The report states further that in general all of the SBA’s calls for proposals are published in the weekend editions of all the major Hebrew newspapers, in various internet sites (in Hebrew) and on the SBA website and that “all are clearly suitable for submissions from Arab filmmakers as well”.

“unfortunately not enough Arab filmmakers submitted proposals despite the SBA’s publications and this is the reason why the SBA attempts, these days, to create a direct link to Arab filmmakers”. “It is the intention of the SBA”, the report concluded “to ensure that filmmakers from the Arab sector will see themselves as equal with regard to all the SBA calls for proposals”.

Cable and Satellite transmissions started in the mid-1990s, regulated by The Council for Cable TV and Satellite Broadcasting (CTSC) which, like the SBA, is obliged by law to “promote local, original content production ... (and) to ensure the broadening of diversity and pluralism in content and channels, to promote community TV... to protect minors and to protect the interest of minority sectors of the population”.⁶⁷

The Council regulates two types of broadcasts: subscriber television and special interest commercial channels. The coming of satellite multi-channel television for subscribers (currently 75% of Israeli households receive television transmission via the Cable company Hot, or by the Satellite company Yes) has dramatically changed the patterns of television consumption of many of the Palestinian households in Israel. It enabled them to watch the many Arab channels from across the world via satellite and to move away from the Israeli channels. The special interest commercial channels that are operated by the CTSC were supposed to address the problem of insufficient Arabic broadcasts on Israeli television with the founding of a special Arabic channel.

Several attempts were made in the past decade to establish a special interest channel in Arabic but all failed to materialise. Time and again the CTSC advertised tenders to recruit an operator for the Arab channel but no successful bidder was found. According to the Palestinian NGO *I’lam*, which was centrally involved in monitoring the tenders, a

According to the report, out of 108 submissions on the set topics, 14 dealt with the “Arab sector”, but only one was submitted by an “Arab filmmaker”. In addition, out of the general proposals submitted in that year, (that is not as part of the set topics) 15 were about the “Arab sector” and 2 were by an “Arab filmmaker”. The report lists two additional designated funding schemes that also address Arab filmmakers - the Snunit scheme for young filmmakers and the Slice of Life scheme for original documentaries. These attracted 4 submissions from “Arab filmmakers”.

⁶⁷ As stated in the Ministry of Communication website: <http://www.moc.gov.il/136-en/MOC.aspx>. Accessed 14. 05. 2006.

combination of factors hinder the realistic possibility of a commercial Arab channel: mistrust in the Israeli media on the part of Palestinian investors, misunderstanding of the potential of the Arab market and conflicting ideas about the nature of such a channel. *I'lam's* report claims that for such a channel to succeed, both in competing against the wide range of Arab channels available via Satellite and in combating the ingrained mistrust of the Palestinian community in Israeli television, the proposed channel must produce relevant content, address political and social issues, rather than mere entertainment, and ensure the programmes are, in large part, made by Palestinians.⁶⁸ In addition, the CTSC channels that specialise in documentaries and Israeli films became an important platform for original films and an additional source of funding. These include the cable TV (HOT) channel 8, which is known for its liberal agenda and has supported the more critical and alternative films that were produced in Israel in recent years, together with *YES Doco* the documentary channel broadcast by Yes, the satellite company.

In general, the television industry is less open to Palestinian directors and issues than the film industry. This is related partly to the self-perception (rightly or wrongly) of the Israeli film industry as liberal and open (and politically leftist) and partly to the difference between the two mediums. While Israeli cinema is perceived as more elitist, the television industry is seen as more populist and directed at the Israeli consensus. More so than the film industry, the television industry is ruled by an overriding notion that 'Arabs on screen will never bring viewers'. This is despite the fact that there is a substantial number of potential Palestinian viewers.

A Note on Censorship

Censorship of cinema in Israel exists both officially, as part of Israel's legislation, and unofficially in various forms of self-censorship. The censoring body, the Council for

⁶⁸ In comparison, other sectors in Israel, who were seen to be under-represented by the media, have had their needs met by the establishment of the CTSC. For example, CTSC's special channels include an Israeli channel in Russian and there are two other Russian channels available. These serve a population slightly smaller than the Palestinian minority.

Review of Films and Plays (often referred to in English as the Israeli Theatre and Movie Censorship Board) was formed by the British authorities at the time of the Mandate and has been incorporated into Israeli legislation with the establishment of the state. While censorship of theatre was abolished in 1989, after a ruling of the Israeli Supreme Court, the board continues to act as the censor of films today. In addition, the IDF military censor, whose primary concern is security, oversees all forms of publications in Israel, including films.

Over the years the board has censored several films, a number of these on grounds related to the conflict. In several cases the board's decisions have been appealed against to the Israeli Supreme Court. However, as Moshe Zimmerman (2003) observes, generally there is a consensus on the necessity of institutional censorship. According to Zimmerman, censorship continues to exist in Israel despite Israel's self-perception as a liberal democracy for a number of reasons. Firstly, this is because of the dominant view that the rights of "security" and "individual liberties" (such as the freedom of speech) are in contradiction to one another, and that a society that wishes to retain a state of security should voluntarily relinquish some of its individual liberties. Secondly, it is because in Israeli politics the impact of the visual image assumed a heightened level of importance, compared with other forms of art. Since Israel's establishment, its political leaders have always been wary of the power of film and television, and the need to supervise it closely is by now a notion rooted in the Israeli public discourse. Furthermore, since institutionalised censorship existed before the establishment of the state, over the years Israeli filmmakers have developed various techniques to bypass censorship (that have since become a normative mode of practice) while at the same time willingly accepting the necessity of its existence.

Many scholars of Israeli cinema maintain that since the 1980s Israeli cinema has increasingly produced films that are politically critical (especially in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) and challenge the consensus in Israel. Yet, as Zimmerman (*Ibid.*), following Shohat (1989a), argues, many of these films, while seemingly critical at first sight, are revealed, when more attentive analysis is applied, to be engaging in "false

dilemmas” and ultimately reaffirming consensual positions. According to Zimmerman, the criticism within these films is limited precisely because they are created within a context of production that is imbued with self-censorship. As he puts it:

This self censorship was instilled in filmmakers as part of their ‘natural’ development within the Israeli society and rendered them incapable of ‘true’ criticism. In fact these filmmakers, out of fear (conscious or unconscious) of the film funds and broadcasters as well as of the potential refusal of cinemas to screen films that contest the consensus, shy away from making such films (ibid: 61).

Official, or institutional, censorship of Palestinian filmmakers has thus far been relatively rare. Yet, in 2003, as I discuss in more detail in chapter five, for the first time in 15 years the Censorship Board banned Mohammad Bakri’s documentary *Jenin, Jenin*, on the grounds that the film contains potential for public incitement. While Bakri successfully appealed to the Supreme Court, the stormy public debate around the case in many ways marks the boundaries of the Israeli political discourse. Furthermore, as I illustrate the next chapter, within a context of production that is imbued with self-censorship, Palestinian filmmakers, as a result, often also exercise various degrees of self-censorship.

Diversity in practice: the limits of the discourse

Although the developments in Israeli media and film industries opened up new opportunities for Palestinian filmmakers, as the summary above demonstrates, the level of support for Palestinian films by film funds and broadcasters is still very limited. Moreover, accurate data about the number of applications made and rejected is hard to obtain, primarily because most of the film funds and broadcasters do not keep ordered records.

For example, the Rabinowitz fund was unable to provide me with accurate data in relation to the number of proposals being made by Palestinians each year. According to

the director of the fund, Giora Eini, unsuccessful applications are not documented. Yet, in an interview in 2005, Eini suggested that while there seems to be a slight increase in the number of applications that are being made by Palestinians, these are still fewer than he would have liked to see. In a follow up conversation in 2009, Yoav Abramovitch, the current Head of Production, said there is still a sense of increase in proposals by Arab directors and that these come mainly from students and recent graduates. The IFF has in recent years received an average of 150 submissions for each of its 'calls for proposals' (usually published twice a year), out of which, following a complex selection process, four to five films are chosen for development. According to David Lipkin, the Fund's vice-manager, only a small fraction of these are made by Palestinians. Yet, Lipkin claimed that in the past few years there has been a perception that the number of proposals submitted by Palestinians is growing. Of the 150 proposals in 2005, 10 were from Palestinian directors.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the interviews I conducted with film fund directors and commissioning editors (as well as other producers and activists) were useful in providing, if not accurate data, then a sense of the discursive environment within which the new regulations, in relation to diversity and representation of minorities, are addressed and implemented by the funding bodies. To an extent, this discursive environment sets the boundaries within which – and against which - Palestinian filmmakers in Israel work.

In general, the vast majority of film fund directors and commissioning editors I interviewed expressed an interest in promoting Palestinian-Israeli filmmakers, as well as in funding films that deal with the Palestinian community in Israel. The only fund director who did not express this was Gideon Gnnani, the director of the Makor Foundation. In fact, the majority of my interviewees described a situation in which they seek to support "Arab filmmakers" but there are too few applications made. While the reasons for this state of affairs can be numerous, the majority of my interviewees suggested, in one way or another, that the problem lies in a misguided sense of discrimination amongst Palestinian filmmakers, in general cultural differences, and in a lack of "professionalism" by the Palestinian filmmakers.

⁶⁹ Daviv Lipkin, interview, 10 April 2005, Tel Aviv.

In an attempt to address the problem, some of the funds and broadcasters followed a model of 'positive discrimination', setting up special funding and training schemes. This model is by no means unique to the case of the Palestinian community but is often applied as a way of promoting diversity or multiculturalism across the cultural industries in Israel. These are often referred to as the 'designated' (Yiudim) or 'prioritized' budgets and are designed to address the different 'sectors' of Israeli society. Between 2002 and 2005 three foundations set up designated funding schemes, which were aimed at the specific needs of the Palestinian community. However, the approach of these designated schemes was inconsistent. Their contours were defined differently in each case and involved differing processes of application and selection.

A primary example is that of the New Foundation for Cinema and Television. In 2002 it launched two designated funding schemes for Palestinians: one for films by what the fund described as 'Israeli-Arabs' and a separate one for Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. This division attracted a great deal of protest from Palestinian filmmakers. In response, the Foundation decided to change its designated funding scheme in the following year to one scheme that was dedicated to "Arab culture". This new scheme attracted proposals from Jews and Palestinians alike and many were related to Arab Jews rather than Palestinians.⁷⁰ In 2004 no designated scheme was set out for Palestinians. In 2005 the New Foundation's director, David Fisher, took a more proactive approach. Together with the Second Broadcast Authority (SBA) the Foundation published in the Arab newspapers and the (Hebrew) popular daily *Yediot Ahronot* an open invitation for Arab filmmakers to come to a public meeting in order to "open a dialogue" between commissioners and filmmakers about the state of Arab filmmaking in Israel. The meeting was held in Nazareth and about 50 filmmakers and aspiring filmmakers attended. Following the meeting the Foundation announced a new funding scheme in collaboration with the SBA. The scheme was to include two phases: first, applicants would submit proposals for development, of which the best proposals would

⁷⁰ Out of a total of 25 proposals 15 were submitted by Palestinian applicants, two of which were granted production budgets and one granted seed-money for development, all of whom were Palestinians.

be selected for a training workshop. During the training each filmmaker will develop his project tutored by an experienced filmmaker allocated by the foundation. The best of the developed projects would then be granted production funding. When explaining the rationale behind the training scheme Fisher said:

This scheme emerged out of my own interest to see films about Arabs by Arabs...not just the new-colonialist films that Jews make about Arabs. I had a feeling that there is a revival of filmmaking in the Arab sector and reacted to it ... there is a clear mental distance between Nazareth and Tel Aviv and it was reflected in the unrest that was expressed in the meeting. Arab filmmakers have a feeling that they are being blocked...it is difficult for them to accept rejection and to understand that this is not personal, not a national issue or discrimination. A lot of them after graduating from film schools try to apply once and if they get rejected they divert to other professions...⁷¹.

While Yossi Mula, the Head of Programmes in the Second Broadcast Authority, (who initiated the meeting together with Fisher) had different motives to those of Fisher, he also emphasized that the shortage of proposals by Palestinian filmmakers is related to their misguided sense of discrimination and lack of professionalism:

In general I want to promote Arab filmmaking...it has nothing to do with my political views or whether I love them or not, this commitment for representation [of diversity] is part of my wider worldview. We have to incorporate the Arab population as well into the public broadcasts, to understand them as neighbors and to create a dialogue... I am willing to invest in training, I sent professional filmmakers to work with them and am setting up a year long scriptwriting training programme but there are still very few who dare to apply for the calls for funding that we publish, and if they get 'no' for an answer they give up. Between themselves they keep pumping the pain and the feelings of discrimination but are doing very little to get out of that cycle...one of the problems is that they work with their guts; they don't know how to write a proposal appropriately or how to pitch a project.⁷²

The training scheme of the New Foundation and SBA resulted in the production of one film, Basel Tannous's *Arus Eljalil* (2006). The foundation has not repeated this training

⁷¹ David Fisher, interview, 10 April 2005, Tel Aviv.

⁷² Yossi Mulla, interview, 15.7.2005, Tel Aviv.

scheme but since then has continued to address Palestinian filmmakers, and topics about the Palestinian community in Israel, through different calls for proposals that were aimed towards the periphery in a more general sense.⁷³ For example, a number of projects that the New Foundation supported involved Palestinian filmmakers, such as Uri Rosenwaks *The Film Class* (2006), a filmmaking workshop for young Bedouins in the Bedouin town Rahat in south Israel, or the project *Postcards from Here*, which started in 2009 and offers tutoring for young filmmakers from the Galilee, some of whom are Palestinians.⁷⁴ Another meeting of the foundation's director with cinema students in the Emek Ha'yarden college in the Galilee, which has a large number of Arab students, was held in 2010.⁷⁵ Since 2006, the New Foundation has also invested in the Greenhouse project, an intensive one-year training programme that is offered on a regional level for aspiring filmmakers from across the Mediterranean. In this capacity, the New Foundation supports filmmakers from Israel (Jews and Arabs) as well as Palestinians from the PA or filmmakers from other Arab countries. This is part of a wider trend of the Israeli film and media industries to position themselves within the growing transnational and global media and film market, often as one of the European countries.

Similar conditions of instability existed in the policies of the other foundations, which initiate different funding schemes, with different selection processes each year. Other fund directors and commissioning editors have expressed similar position to that of Mulla and Fisher. Ziv Nave, the director of the Gesher fund, described to me how enthusiastic she is to support Arab filmmaking in Israel but how difficult it is for her to find suitable projects.⁷⁶ Itai Lanzberg, the documentary commissioning editor of Channel 1, said that hardly any Arabs ever propose anything to channel 1. This, according to Lanzberg "is not only because of us (the channel), it is also that they have a problem with the channel, they are deterred from submitting anything to us. I think it is because they already anticipate the refusal".⁷⁷

⁷³ Telephone interview, Riki Zaks, 20.4. 2010.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ziv Nave, interview, 14.4.2005, Tel Aviv.

⁷⁷ Itai Lanzberg, interview, 9.4.2005, Shoham.

Udi Leon, who is currently the Head of Prioritized Programmes and Cultural Diversity in Keshet (one of the Channel 2 franchise holders), and was the founder of the Gesher cinema fund and acted as its director until 2003, argued that the “Arab community” is not unique:

In the first year of Gesher’s existence we received about 300 proposals, about 270 of which were from Tel Avivians...this situation stems firstly from the fact that there are hardly any filmmakers from the peripheries, and secondly from the alienation these communities feel towards the establishment. When a Tel-Avivian sends a proposal and it is not accepted, he understands that this is not personal, he knows how the system works and he will try again in the next call. But the filmmakers from these ‘peripheries’ have such a level of mistrust in the establishment that they are convinced that the reason they were rejected is because they are from the peripheries and they give up. I saw it time and again with Arabs, *Mizrachim*, orthodox religious (Jewish), Ethiopians, it is the same reaction with all of them.⁷⁸

The Israeli Film Fund and the Rabinowitz Foundation have not set up any ‘designated’ funding schemes for Palestinian filmmakers. The directors of both funds stressed that they oppose positive discrimination and that the criteria for supporting films in their organizations are “strictly professional” and based on the artistic merit of the project, rather than its subject matter. Giroa Eini, the director of the Rabinowitz Foundation, discussed the example of *Thirst* (Tawfik Abu-Wael, 2003), which was highly acclaimed for its artistic visual language, as a model of the films that the foundation would wish to support. Similarly, David Lipkin, the Israeli Film Fund’s vice-manager, explained that often the problem with Palestinian films is their inability to “communicate” with its audiences. As he explained:

Since we are commissioning fiction rather than documentaries, our guidelines for funding take into account also the commercial prospects of the film...when a film is a good film it draws audiences. A good film has to be communicative to its audience on some level, it has to be relevant to them...we do not dictate themes or issues or have specific interest in the representation of a particular community but it is important to us that the film will be relevant to an Israeli audience. We supported Arab filmmakers but

⁷⁸ Udi Leon. interview, 10.4.2005, Tel Aviv.

we have to take into account that issues that are relevant to the Arab community are not necessarily relevant to the Israeli public in general.⁷⁹

Importantly, whether there was a designated scheme or not, the commissioning processes in most cases were less than favorable to Palestinians who were not fluent in Hebrew and well familiar with Israeli culture. Only in a few cases were applications in Arabic accepted and in many cases there were no Palestinians involved in the selection processes.⁸⁰ The implications of this on the ability of the funding bodies to understand the treatments that were submitted by Palestinian filmmakers was overlooked by most of my interviewees, which, as the quotes above demonstrate, were guided by some universal idea of film 'professionalism'.

Another overriding notion the funders expressed was that "the cultural gap between the Jewish and Arab communities in Israel" was an obstacle to the films. Rather than seeing the films as tools for bridging the gap between the communities, funders and commissioning editors saw the gap as an impediment that ensures these films are doomed to fail.

For example, Yossi Mula said: "... there is a cultural gap which is hard to bridge. The stories that they want to tell do not interest my audience. So when I am giving money for an Arab film I know that it is not going to be popular and not going to have high viewing figures, but it needs to be done as part of my obligation as a public broadcast service".⁸¹

Udi Leon, who as part of his role in Keshet is trying to promote greater representation for the Palestinian community on channel 2, explained it in this way:

Since there is no real public service channel in Israel we have to work with the commercial television. Within it the total of designated budgets of channel 2 for

⁷⁹ David Lipkin, interview, 10.4. 2005, Tel Aviv. Similar things about the fund's policies of commissioning said Katri Shkhori, the fund's director in a recent interview to Israeli paper *Ha'aretz*. See: Andelman, *Ha'aretz*, 31.5.2010.

⁸⁰ One exception is Sayed Kashua, who acted as a lector for the Israeli Film Fund and the new foundation.

⁸¹ Yossi Mulla, interview, 15.7.2005, Tel Aviv.

example is only about 5% of the budget, so we start with very little money... [and] in commercial television the problem is with the advertising companies and since they are all Tel Avivians, and the target audience in their mind is the same, they don't see the potential of other markets like the Arabs or the (Jewish) religious community. Anything that ventures out of this middle class Tel- Aviv orientated comfort zone is perceived as too much of a risk...

For example, if I was approached by an Arab filmmaker who wanted to produce a prime time Arab television drama I would not invest in it. Not because I don't think it is important but because in today's climate there is no chance that such a programme will be bought by any of the broadcasters or the advertisers. I would have liked to put on the Israeli screen something like the American Bill Cosby Show but I can't see it happening. Firstly, because the level of antagonism of the Israeli public towards the Arabs is much higher than what was the American public's antagonism towards the blacks at the time. Secondly, because the 'price' of being able to put on such a show would be that the Cosby family had to be turned into 'white' and middle class, in order to be accepted. It will be a waste of time to try... A better approach would be gradual, including Arab characters in popular dramas for example, to get the public used to seeing their image on the screen in contexts that are 'normal', that are outside of the context of the conflict.⁸²

While the fund directors and commissioning editors expressed an interest in films that tell "stories from the Arab community", there seemed to be an implicit favoring of films which tell those stories in ways that are closer to the cultural conventions of the Jewish majority. For example, David Fisher summed up his vision of Arab filmmaking in Israel when saying "I would like to see them make in cinema what Sayed Kashua made in literature". Kashua, a Palestinian journalist and a writer in his early forties, is perhaps one of the most visible Palestinian writers who publish exclusively in Hebrew. His two novels, *Dancing Arabs* (2002) and *Let it be Morning* (2006), his weekly column in the widely-spread Jerusalem newspaper *Ha'ir*, and his recent television satiric sitcom *Arab Labour* are all poignant humoristic portrayals of the lives of Palestinians in Israel. Notwithstanding the importance of Kashua's work which expresses a form of cultural hybridity that many of his counterparts identify with, Fisher's statement reveals the

⁸² Udi Leon. interview, 10.4.2005, Tel Aviv.

extent to which Palestinian culture can be endorsed in Israel. His statement, like the problem of 'communicativity' that Lipkin and Mulla refer to, and the axiomatic notion that "Arabs will never bring viewers" that rules the television industry, as well as Giora Eini's ambition to see more films like *Thirst* because of its universal appeal, are all underlined by a sense of superiority that informs the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity. In other words, the Israeli public sphere is willing to accept the Arab as long as the Arab speaks its language and submits to its ideals. Yossi Mulla's explanation of how the cultural gap hinders Palestinian film in Israel demonstrates this approach explicitly. According to Mulla:

The cultural gap is also reflected in the kind of films they make. They focus on small stories; they are often driven by emotions and tribalism and fail to see the film in a wider perspective. I need to make sure that the films will appeal to the wider Israeli audience, my emphasis is then that the films will deal with bigger issues and will have several dimensions, that the aims of the films will be more general. It is important for me to make sure that we help them to make better films. I want them to choose the topics but they need help with the production, their understanding of visual language is often less developed...

One example is the film *Al Jiser*. Ibtisam focused on the internal struggles in the village, which are not interesting for the general public. In my view the film had potential but it missed its mark. It is because of [Arab filmmakers'] cultural inability to separate emotion from reason, and emotions take the forefront. Ibtisam didn't want to touch on many issues out of respect to the people and the place. Her emotional commitment held her back, she thinks she crossed boundaries with the criticism she made in the film, I think she only scratched the surface. This is the cultural gap and it is very difficult to decide to fund the films despite this gap.⁸³

The way in which notions of professionalism were articulated by the funders exemplifies Orientalist and (or neo-Orientalist) discourses. For example, Mulla's reference to the filmmakers' tendency to focus on "small stories" as a sign of tribalism and unprofessionalism overlooks the fact that the dominant – and celebrated – mode of Israeli documentary in recent years is precisely that of the personal, small scale "I" films

⁸³ Yossi Mulla, interview, 15.7.2005, Tel Aviv.

(as they are referred to in Israel), let alone the fact that this tendency for subjective documentaries is part of a worldwide trend. His interpretation of the filmmaker's deliberations over ethics and issues of documentary representation as a sign of "cultural inability to separate emotion from reason" needs little explanation to those who are familiar with Orientalist discourses. Similarly, the impulse that was expressed by Mulla and others to "help them make better films", and which resulted in the various training schemes, exemplifies the speakers' self-perception of Israel, and its (imagined) hegemonic Ashkenazi culture, as the 'agent of progress' that seeks to educate the traditional Arab and propel him into the age of modernity.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to chart the development of Palestinian filmmaking in Israel and to map out the industrial and discursive environments within which filmmakers work. The shifts of emphasis as a result of new laws and regulations in the 1990s towards multiculturalism (as opposed to an emphasis on Jewish identity and culture) opened up opportunities for production of films that diverge from the Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony, and come from Israel's several peripheries, including the Palestinian community. Yet, for the Palestinian community, whose relationship with the hegemonic centre is different to that of other marginal communities, these opportunities are demarcated by the discourse of the national conflict inside and outside of Israel.

In the intersection of colonialism and Euro-modernity, as it was reflected in relation to cinema production, the national conflict, so long as the issue did not enforce itself as in the case of *Jenin, Jenin*, was set aside. The different schemes or policies that were set up by film funds and broadcasters did not refer to the national issue in any way. The issue was also not raised in the conversations I had with commissioning editors and fund directors. Only when I probed them to address it, did they all insist that politics does not interfere with the decision-making process and that "Arab directors" are free to make films about any issue they wish to address.

What my interviewees concentrated on were issues of cultural difference and gaps in modernization. Within the Zionist discursive regime, that is intrinsically ambivalent, the funders addressed the Palestinian community as another 'sector' of Israeli society, seemingly positioned on the periphery of the imagined hegemonic Ashkenazi-Jewish centre and maintained that "Arab directors" should be promoted in the same way that Ethiopian Jews are promoted, or religious settlers, or any of the other of the 'sectors' that are underrepresented in Israeli film and media. Commissioning policies and distribution strategies were informed by the discursive dichotomy between the 'social' and the 'political'. Films by Palestinian citizens, constantly referred to as "Arab films", were often classified as 'social' rather than 'political'.⁸⁴ Within the framework of the 'social', new policies and funding schemes were guided by a discourse of multiculturalism, which is informed by the more contemporary Western liberal discourses. Homi Bhabha (1990) has pointed to the limits of the discourse of multiculturalism in Western societies. According to Bhabha, in liberal philosophical tradition, and for democratic societies, "the idea that cultures are diverse and that in some sense the diversity is a good and positive thing... has been known for a long time ... it is a commonplace of plural, democratic societies to say that they can encourage and accommodate cultural diversity" (208). Yet, despite multicultural policies, racism still prevails, because the notion of "universalism that paradoxically permits diversity, masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests" (ibid.).⁸⁵

⁸⁴ As the example of the SBA report from 2004 demonstrates, despite the statement that Arab filmmakers are free to propose any subject matter, the calls for proposals that the SBA published were all related to social issues. Similarly, the SBA annual catalogs exemplified this. Films that were made by Palestinian filmmakers were predominantly categorized under different social categories, rather than political ones. For example, in the category 'Jewish Arab relations' no films by Palestinians were listed, although some of the Palestinian films that were categorized under social issues do deal with Jewish Arab relations.

⁸⁵ Bhabha discusses this in response to the controversy following the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, which threw into question notions of Western liberalism in face of Islamic fundamentalism. In the Israeli context, political events quite regularly provoke public debates, articulated within the same discursive framework.

Chapter 3

Context of Production: Palestinian filmmakers in Israel

This chapter forms the second part of my discussion of the contexts of production. Having set the structural conditions and the dominant discourse of the cinema and television industries in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on Palestinian filmmakers and organisations. It aims to examine the ways in which Palestinian filmmakers negotiate with the conditions and discourse of the Israeli industry. Based largely on interviews with filmmakers and organisations, details of which are provided in appendix 1, this chapter outlines the key strategies adopted by filmmakers and the central dilemmas that inform their work.

The recent increase of Palestinian filmmaking in Israel was prompted by both the emergence of young filmmakers, who work largely on their own adopting different strategies of production, and a more organised effort to promote Palestinian filmmaking by Palestinian NGOs, associations and film schools. Only two or three private production companies were in business during my main period of research, and these were mainly engaged in producing commercial product for the private market. Yet, the growing market of global Arab networks such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, which have shown increased interest in the Palestinian community in Israel, has recently provided more opportunities for private companies.

NGOs and film Schools

Over the past two decades, as discussed in the first chapter, much of the political activity of Palestinians in Israel, especially of the younger generation, has shifted from party politics to an emerging civil society and 'third sector', which is operated by a wide array of Palestinian NGOs and associations. A number of NGOs currently work to develop Palestinian filmmaking in Israel, both by creating hubs for production – at times being an alternative source of funding – and by campaigning for greater inclusion of Palestinians in the Israeli media and in the film industry. Two of the more prominent

NGOs that deal with media and film are the Nazareth-based *I'lam* (a Media Centre for Arab Palestinians in Israel) and the Haifa-based *Mossawa* (The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens of Israel). *I'lam* runs a production centre which trains filmmakers, produces films and lends equipment, alongside a research centre that produces periodical reports and policy papers about the Palestinians and the media in Israel. *Mossawa*, primarily an advocacy organisation, has dedicated much of its work to issues of equality and access to media and film production, and has recently been involved in organising film festivals and special screenings in Haifa and Nazareth.⁸⁶ Both organisations were centrally involved in campaigning for the establishment of a viable independent television channel for the Palestinian community in Israel.

Film schools and film departments have proliferated in colleges and universities across Israel in recent years. Some of these schools such as the Sapir College in the Negev (south Israel) and the Tel-Khi, Emeq-Izrael and Emeq Ha'yarden colleges in the Galilee, are situated on the Israeli periphery and recruit local students, including many Palestinians who live in these areas. At the same time, small independent Palestinian film and media schools were established, such as the Almanar College in Taibe and the AP film school in Nazareth. Both are dedicated to fostering local Palestinian film culture in Israel and training youngsters in media and film production, although their political orientations differ.

The Almanar College was established in 1999 in Taibe, a town at the heart of the Triangle area populated by about 250,000 Palestinians. The college was founded by a group of local educators with the aim of addressing a particular section of the Palestinian population for whom academic education in Israeli universities or abroad is inaccessible. This is partly due to the objections of traditional families to exposing their youngsters to the values and codes of conduct that are associated with Israeli and Western campuses. According to the college founders, this is a large section of Palestinian youth, approximately 67%, and consists mainly of women. "Almanar", they

⁸⁶ For more detailed information on the activities of Mossawa and I'lam, including their list of publications see: <http://www.ilam-center.org/eng>; <http://www.mossawacenter.org>.

said, “offers them an academic environment that is smaller, local and sensitive to these issues and thus seen by many parents as a safer option”.⁸⁷ The college’s curriculum, which includes both theory and practice, aims to train a new generation of media and filmmakers that will work within the Israeli industry. In discussions I had with staff and students during my visits to the school in 2005, both the founders of the school and the students stressed that the emphasis of their work is put on exploring social and cultural issues that are relevant to the Palestinian community in Israel, although a small number of students also dealt with issues of national identity in their films. In the last few years students and graduates of Almanar arrived on the Israeli film and television scene. Some of the film funds and broadcasters who reported that there is a growth in the applications of Palestinians noted that many were made by students of Almanar; the Gesher fund runs a special project with Almanar and the SBA launched a special ‘social television project’ in collaboration with Almanar and Tel Aviv University.

The Arab Palestinian (AP) Film School in Nazareth was founded in 2005 by a dedicated young filmmaker, Anan Barakat. Barakat’s orientation is much more political and oppositional than Almanar’s. While Almanar confined itself largely to the category of the ‘social’, Barakat aims to break the discursive boundaries between the social and the political. His ambition was to form a school that would provide a space for critical political *and* cultural debates. As he explained to me in an interview on the eve of the opening of the school:

The field of filmmaking and culture in general is not dealt with seriously in the Palestinian community at the moment. More and more people are making films but there is no culture of cinema and no ethical or critical debate...and they work individually, competing with one another. There is also no place for academic consideration of Palestinian films...I want the school to grow and to be a place for fruitful and open critical debate about Palestinian films here... I want its graduates to have a firm understanding of what it is that they do and why, rather than just copying what is done in the industry here or by Palestinian filmmakers abroad.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Interview, Donia Brancy and Mohammad Mansour, Almanar College, 24.3.2005

⁸⁸ Anan Barakat, interview, Nazareth, 23.5.2005.

The AP school opened in 2005 with a small number of students and has since faced serious financial and organisational difficulties which have impeded its ability to establish and grow. Despite its small-scale operation the school has managed to gain exposure in Israel and elsewhere and to generate innovative, largely experimental filmmaking. It has a strong online presence (in social networks, blogs and special interest websites and online journals) and has featured in various Television programmes. In addition, the AP school publishes a cinema journal in Arabic, *Malfat Al-Sinima*, the first of its kind in Israel. At the beginning of 2010, reflecting on the school's activity, Barakat said in an interview on Israeli Television: "the school is still an ongoing project in development. We are still small-scale and still experimental, but this is how I want it to be. I do not want it to become an establishment. Part of what I want to achieve needs to be done from such a position".⁸⁹

Barakat insists on the Palestinian identity of the AP school, but at the same time the curriculum of the school includes courses on Israeli cinema. Israeli Jewish filmmakers make up some of the school staff. As Barakat said: "I encourage the students to draw on many cultural influences and languages including Hebrew... I also welcome Israeli Jewish students, as long as they have an interest in Arab culture and speak Arabic".⁹⁰ Insisting on also subverting the discourse of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Barakat was looking to expand the activities of the school both within the Palestinian Authority and to the heart of the Israeli establishment. In the last two years he attempted to open an extension of the school in Jenin and in Tel Aviv. According to Barakat "this is how one creates a true dialogue. I am a Palestinian and I come to Tel Aviv as a Palestinian. But I will also bring the Israeli culture to Jenin and the Arab world".⁹¹ In a follow up telephone conversation with me in April 2010, Barakat talked about increasing difficulties in realising his plans due to conflicts arising both with Tel Aviv University, where he was hoping to base his Tel Aviv extension, and with his counterparts in Jenin.

⁸⁹ Television interview with Rino Zror, Documentary with Rino Zror, Israeli Educational TV (Channel 23). Broadcast 25.01.2010.

⁹⁰ Anan Barakat. interview, Nazareth, 22.7.2010.

Television interview with Rino Zror, Documentary with Rino Zror, Israeli Educational TV (Channel 23). Broadcast 25.01.2010.

Other organizations promoting Palestinian filmmaking in Israel include the *El-Sana* association, established by two young filmmakers, Ihab Salti and Safa Dabour in 2004. As well as aiming to foster local Palestinian film culture in Israel, El-Sana operates a cinematheque in Nazareth (similar to the cinematheques in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem). Like the AP school, Salti and Dabour have to struggle with financial and organizational difficulties. However, the events that they have managed to stage, such as a film festival in the city, special screenings and pitching workshops in collaboration with the New Foundation for Cinema and Television and the Second Broadcast Authority, contributed to the visibility of the emerging Palestinian interest in cinema.

These NGOs and others are funded partly by Israeli public funds and partly by donations from other sources, often from European funds or private donors. Funding is an increasingly problematic issue for them. One set of problems arise (as I have already discussed) from the need to fight discriminatory policies or the limits of political discourse when applying for Israeli public funds. Additional problems arise when applying for funding outside of Israel. Accepting funds from Israel increasingly becomes an impediment to the political profile of these NGOs outside of Israel, and can sometimes hinder their work and their ability to attract donations from abroad.

While the level of ‘politicisation’ of the different associations and NGOs varies, these organisations provide an alternative route for film production distribution and exhibition. Furthermore, working through NGOs, on the level of civil society rather than official politics, often allows space and a greater freedom to manoeuvre strategically between a position of rejection of the state of Israel and its institutions, and political intervention within these institutions. For example, alongside *I’lam*’s activities to promote greater inclusion of Palestinian citizens in Israeli media and film, which include lobbying in the Knesset, meeting and negotiating with media-related institutions and so on, it produced a series of documentaries about Bedouins in the Negev, which were intentionally kept apart from any collaboration with Israeli bodies. The documentaries, who started production in 2005, were funded by European sources and directed by the

Palestinian- Canadian Nada Al-Yassir whose position categorically rejected any links with Israeli institutions or individuals. Another example is the AP school. The school was initially funded by the Ministry of Culture but later had to bid for funds from the Cinema Council each year. Barakat on the one hand applied for some of these funds, on the other hand he rejected an offer from the leading Israeli film school Sam Spiegel to sponsor the school. As he said:

Renan Shor [the director of the Sam Spiegel school] called and congratulated me on the initiative and offered that the school will be an extension of Sam Spiegel... I said no, that it is important that this would be an Arab school and he did not understand why. He told me not to create a ghetto, I told him that he chooses to see it as a ghetto, it's an Israeli terminology. What I am talking about is locality and culture.⁹²

Strategies of production of individual Filmmakers

Much like the NGOs, individual filmmakers oscillate between a position of working within the Israeli industry, making political interventions 'inside', or working outside of Israel and denouncing it altogether. This tension has underpinned Palestinian political activism in Israel for many years, as noted in the previous chapter. It also underlines the work of Palestinian filmmakers from Israel. Some filmmakers said that the need to choose where they work is often imposed on them by the contexts of production and distribution, rather than being their genuine political concern. Working inside Israel is often perceived as a political act of collaboration, or an act of 'normalization' suggesting an acceptance of Zionism. With the escalation of the conflict in recent years, greater emphasis has been put on 'separation' both in the Israeli political discourse and in the Palestinian discourse of resistance. Yet, the strategies and positions of individual filmmakers differ from one another, depending on their political affiliation and personal circumstances. Additionally, positions and strategies of the same filmmakers have shifted over time often in response to the geo-political dynamics of the conflict.

Working outside/Working inside

⁹² Anan Barakat. interview, Nazareth, 23.5.2005.

Some of the more established Palestinian filmmakers today grew up in Israel and have emigrated to the West. I have already discussed the work of Michel Khleifi, who is largely removed from Israel. Two other important examples are the well-known directors Elia Suleiman and Hany Abu Assad. As I have indicated, the primary mode of production of Palestinian cinema is 'interstitial' (Naficy, 2001), and this is also evident in the tendency to work in between the different sites of production (West, Arab countries, PA and Israel). Both Suleiman and Abu Assad are Israeli citizens who grew up in Nazareth. Both were born in the later years of the military regime and were the first generation to be educated in an established Arab state school system within Israel.⁹³ Working primarily outside of Israel, the two directors have strategically utilized their Israeli citizenship in order to film inside Israel, and at times worked with specific (often leftist) figures from the Israeli industry. Suleiman's first feature *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1995) was made in Israel and funded by the IFF, while two of his later films, *Divine Intervention* (2003), *The Time that Remains* (2009), that complete a loose semi-autobiographical trilogy, were funded by European sources.⁹⁴ Specifically *Chronicle* and *The Time that Remains*, as I will later discuss, are set in his hometown Nazareth. Abu-Assad's work is more removed from Israel, both in terms of the subject matter of his films and their contexts of production. Apart from *Nazareth 2000*, which

⁹³ Elia Suleiman was born in 1960 and is currently working between New York, Paris and Israel/Palestine. Hany Abu-Assad was born in 1961 to a Muslim family in Nazareth and left Israel for the Netherlands in 1981.

⁹⁴ Largely self-educated Suleiman's first two films *Introduction to the End of an Argument* (1991) and *Homage by Association* (1992) were made in New York and deal with the Arab/Palestinian experience in the West. *Chronicle of a Disappearance* established Suleiman's name as a talented auteur Palestinian director, but it was his second feature, *Divine Intervention* (2003), and its subsequent international success, which positioned Suleiman as the leading Palestinian filmmaker to date. *Divine Intervention* was shot in Israel and the PA and was financed from various European sources. Suleiman was offered funding from the Israeli Film Fund, but rejected it. David Lipkin from the IFF has said to me in an interview that Suleiman experienced difficulties with the marketing of *Chronicle of a Disappearance* because of its Israeli funding and this was one reason for rejecting the funds for *Divine Intervention*. While *Divine Intervention* was not funded by Israeli sources, part of its crew was Israeli (Jewish), as was one of the film's producers. *Divine Intervention* won numerous prizes in festivals around the world and had extended general release in the West, as well as in Israel. It was put forward as a Palestinian entry to the 75th Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film but was denied nomination on the basis that Palestine does not qualify as a 'country'. The rejection of the film by the Academy triggered a controversy that resulted in a change of the Academy's definition of the category 'country', and three years later Abu Assad's film *Paradise Now* was allowed to compete.

deals with the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Nazareth, his films tend to focus on stories from the West Bank and Gaza.⁹⁵

Suleiman and Abu-Assad are undoubtedly two of the leading current Palestinian directors, but less renowned and younger filmmakers have adopted a similar mode of production. Their films are often set in their hometowns in Israel although the filmmakers have based their professional life in the West, applying for funding largely from European funds. These include the young filmmaker Ula Tabari, who left Israel for Paris in recent years, where she made her films *Private Investigation* (2002) (that will be discussed in the next chapter), and *Diaspora* (2005)⁹⁶; Hanna Elias, who has worked in the United States since 1991 and whose first feature *The Olive Harvest* (2003) intentionally included an Israeli-Jewish film crew,⁹⁷ or Kamal Aljafari, who works in Germany and the United States and whose films *The Roof* (2006) and *Port of Memory* (2009) will be discussed in the following chapters.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Abu-Assad, like Suleiman, is self-trained and established his own production company in the Netherlands in 1990s. He has written and directed his first film *Paper House* in 1992. Since, he produced a number of other films - amongst which the acclaimed feature by Rashid Mashrawi *Curfew* (1994) - and wrote and directed his own award winning films: *The 13th* (1998) *Nazareth 2000* (2000), *Ford Transit* (2002), *Ranna's Wedding* (*Al Qudes Fi Yum Akhar* 2002) and his most recent successful fiction *Paradise Now* (*Al Ganna Aaa'n* 2005). *Paradise Now*, which deals with the politically loaded issue of suicide bombers, won numerous prizes in the West and was taken up by the Hollywood company Warner Bros for international distribution. It won the Golden Globe Award for best Foreign Language film in 2006. While none of his films were Israeli-financed, Abu-Assad's productions also include working with leftist individuals in the Israeli industry. One of the producers of *Paradise Now* was the Tel-Aviv based producer Amir Harel, who was centrally involved in the making of the film at an early stage. According to Harel, in the early stages of development he applied to a number of Israeli funds but was rejected, facing, what he defines as "the mental 'brick wall' of Israeli consciousness when it comes to suicide bombers". See: Pinero, Edna (24.2.2005) *Ha'ir*.

⁹⁶ Born in 1970s, Tabari works in different artistic mediums. She studied visual arts and theatre in Israel and started her professional career as an actress, playing in, amongst other films the lead roles, Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and the *Arab Dream*. She has worked within the Israel cultural, art and television industries in different capacities. One of them was hosting a feminist Palestinian talk show for channel 2.

⁹⁷ Elias defines himself as a Palestinian-American. He was born in 1957 in Jerusalem and left to study in California in the late 1980s. *The Olive Harvest* (*Mausem Al Zayton*, 2003) won the Special Jury Prize and the Culture Ministry Prize at the Cairo Film Festival 2003 and was screened in many festivals including the Jerusalem Film Festival in 2003. On the film's website Elias stressed the importance of working with Israeli film professionals for the purpose of building "trust and mutual respect". See www.theoliveharvest.com. Last retrieved on 10.2.2007

⁹⁸ Kamal Aljafari was born in 1972 in Ramle. He worked as a journalist in Israel before moving to study in the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. All his films were produced with the aid of European funding.

The motivations causing each filmmaker to want to leave Israel vary and are affected by personal circumstances as well as political affiliations. Often the decision is guided by a political strategy of resistance and/or a sense of despair at the impossibility of meaningful political action inside Israel. For example, Ula Tabari explained to me in interview:

I had many arguments with friends (filmmakers) about their strategies of work. We each choose our own. Israel is a problematic place, I know it very well but throughout my experience of working there and studying there, I always got to the point where I hit a brick wall. I can't do it any more. I kept looking for a way to break the system and at some point I realised the system is all around, and that I have to work outside of it. So I left for Paris...⁹⁹

Moreover, the move away from Israel, and from one's own home town or village, also informs the filmmakers' work in ways that bring to mind Irit Rogoff's use of the notion of 'active unbelonging' (2000), as the "the very condition of critical theoretical activity" (2000: 18). Talking about his film *The Roof* in a recent Palestinian film festival in London, Kamal Aljafari said:

After a few years of living abroad you start to see your home and your family differently. You develop a different look. And it is with this new look that I came back to my home in Ramle and saw a film. Suddenly I noticed the unfinished flat that makes the roof above my parents' home. I always lived with it as a given, suddenly I saw it as a metaphor for our existence.¹⁰⁰

While some filmmakers are based in the West, for longer or shorter periods of time, others are based either partly or exclusively in Israel and work within the Israeli industry to varying degrees. These filmmakers also deploy an 'interstitial' mode of production in relation to working between the cracks and contradictions of the Israeli industry, which is these days (as I have already described in detail) better funded, more dispersed and guided by a more multicultural approach.

⁹⁹ Ula Tabari, interview, Paris, 26.2.2006.

¹⁰⁰ London Palestinian Film Festival 8.5.2010.

The interstitial mode of production is further reinforced by the growing tendency of the Israeli industry to adopt models of transnational co-productions, especially with European film funds and broadcasters. Israeli funds are more inclined to finance films that have potential for co-production since this contributes to the exposure of Israeli cinema in the West. In addition, the topical nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict prompts European funds to invest in Palestinian films. Since there are no financial mechanisms that enable coproduction agreements with the Palestinian Authority, in the case of Palestinians that are citizens of Israel, co-production agreements are often made between European funds and Israeli funds. On the one hand, this model of transnational co-production increases the funding opportunities for Palestinian filmmakers. On the other, it invites a more complex set of political pressures, as filmmakers need to navigate between European and Israeli political and industrial interests, which are often contradictory.

Furthermore, in the contemporary political climate, working within Israel, and in some cases making films that do not deal overtly with the national conflict, has serious implications for the possibilities of funding and distribution outside of Israel. As many of the young filmmakers that I interviewed testified, there is a growing pressure to resist Israeli funding in view of the escalation of Israeli aggression since 2000.

For example, Ibtisam Mara'ana, one of the more prolific young filmmakers who works exclusively in Israel, said to me in interview:

More and more directors [Palestinian-Israelis] stopped taking money from the Israeli establishment. I was pressurised to do the same. Other filmmakers tried to tell me that I can not make Palestinian films if the funding is Israeli but I think that under the circumstances of our life here, if I pay taxes in this country I should also enjoy the benefits of public funding. I think many of them will go back to ask for Israeli funding at some point.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Ibtisam Mara'ana. interview Rishpon, 26.7.2005.

Mara'ana defines her work as being directed primarily towards "the Arabs of 48".¹⁰² Her films, which I will discuss in length in the following chapters, have been largely ignored outside of Israel and in some cases rejected by Palestinian or Arab film festivals.¹⁰³ Similarly, the young filmmaker Safa Adawi said:

In Egypt [at the *Ismailia* Film Festival] I was treated as an Israeli and got no support. I found myself feeling like a unique phenomenon, they kept calling me all these names 'Israeli Arab' or 'Arab of 48' but they refused to have my film screened in the festival because I was Israeli. I was told that I don't belong to the Palestinian nation, that I am collaborating with the Jews and the Jews are the enemy. In Jordan [during a filmmaking workshop] I got the same message, they were against Palestinian filmmakers who take funds from Israel. It is seen as playing into the hands of Israel's propaganda. In Europe and the US the fact that Israel gives funds to Palestinian films is seen as a sign that Israel is a democracy.¹⁰⁴

Tawfik Abu Wael, who faced a great deal of difficulties to secure general release for his acclaimed film *Thirst* explained:

If I work in Israel it becomes a problem to work outside, both with getting funding and with the distribution. It is not just me it is a problem for all of us. In Europe, if I work in Israel it becomes the only topic of discussion; you are no longer judged on the quality of the films themselves...As far as they [commissioning editors in Europe] are concerned you are either a Palestinian from Gaza or a Zionist-Israeli. There is no 'in between'. Some of them even hinted that if I change my address to East Jerusalem or the West Bank it will be easier... I know that if *Thirst* would have been made by an Iranian or Pakistani filmmaker for example, it would have been embraced, but as far as I understand from the distributors, the problem of the film is not its quality but rather a political one. They

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Ibtisam Mara'ana was born in 1972 in the village of Fureidis on the coastal plain. She studied filmmaking in the Givat Haviva college near her village, and has since wrote and directed six documentaries. Mara'ana is a leading member of the Israeli Documentary Forum and is involved in a number of film and media projects in the Palestinian community, especially with youth.

¹⁰⁴ Safa Adawi, interview, Tur'an, 05.04.2004. Safa is a young filmmaker at the beginning of her career who works mainly on a community and NGO level. She comes from the village of Tur'an near Nazareth and studied filmmaking in Emeq Ha'yarden College. She then participated in filmmaking workshops in Egypt and in Jordan. Like many of the members of the third generation Safa has become more politically conscious, and politically active, since the events of October 2000. Safa has made about four films which were all self-funded. She worked in one of Keshet's filmmakers project, in a number of NGOs (such as I'lam) and on the Arab news programme for the community television of the cable company, Hot.

are being asked: 'if this is a Palestinian filmmaker then where is the conflict? Why did he make such a film?'... the truth is that most of Palestinian cinema would not have existed without Israel. This is the reality of the occupation. Israel is a Fascist state and an occupying force but it is also a capitalist society, and it wants to believe that it is a democracy, so there is room for manoeuvre.¹⁰⁵

Some filmmakers who live in Israel have shifted their positions in response to the escalation of the conflict in recent years; taking the conflict on board more explicitly, either in the subject matter of their films and/or in relation to their strategy of production. While the majority of the films that were made by Palestinians in Israel dealt with the political and social circumstances of the community 'inside', the escalation of Israeli violence during the *Al Aksa Intifada* led to engagement also with the realities across the Green Line. Primary examples are Nizar Hassan, Juliano Mer-Hamis and Mohammad Bakri who have made films about the Israeli invasion of the Jenin refugee camp in 2002, which I discuss at length in chapter six.

Nizar Hassan has worked within the Israeli industry, as well as in the PA, and funded his film from both European and Israeli sources. His documentaries, *Independence (Istiklal, 1994)*, *Words (Kalimat, 1995)*, *Yasmin (1996)*, *Legend (1998)* and *Cut (2000)*, were all funded by Israeli film funds and dealt with the Palestinian community in Israel.¹⁰⁶ Hassan's relationships with the Israeli industry were never smooth but since the outbreak of the *Al Aksa Intifada* he declared that he will no longer apply for Israeli funding or work with Israelis. Hassan has also refused to give me an interview for this research. His recent films such as *Invasion (Ijtiyach, 2002)*, which deals with the Israeli

¹⁰⁵ Tawfik Abu-Wael, interview, 7.4.2005, Tel Aviv. Born in 1976, Abu-Wael grew up in the town Um-el-Phahem and studied cinema at Tel Aviv University. His controversial graduation film *A Diary of a Male Whore (Yawmiyat Ahir, 2001)* triggered conflicts with the university authorities and media coverage. A provocative tale of Isam, a Palestinian male whore in Tel Aviv, the film contains explicit sexual scenes including a rape scene of Isam's mother by Israeli soldiers. Following his graduation Abu-Wael made *Waiting for Salah a-Din (Natreen Sallah el-Din, 2001)* a documentary that depicts the bitter struggle of Palestinians in East Jerusalem against the Israeli authorities. He later made another documentary about the effects of October 2000 on Um-el Phahem (where the police shot demonstrators) but the film was rarely shown. Abu-Wael's cinematic breakthrough came with the making of his acclaimed feature *Thirst*, which is discussed in chapter seven.

¹⁰⁶ Hassan was born in 1960 and grew up in the village Ma'shad near Nazareth. He studied in Haifa University and has been a political activist since. He started his career by working in the Israeli Educational Television, making documentary and factual programmes, and later moved to direct his own films inside Israel. He teaches cinema in Sapir College.

military operation in Jenin in 2002, and *Challenge* (Tahaddi, 2003), which reflects on the media coverage of the killing of the boy Mohammad Al-Dura in 2002, were financed by European and independent sources.

Similarly, Juliano Mer-Hamis has shifted the focus of his work following the events of October 2000. Born to the Jewish leftist activist Arna Mer and the Palestinian leftist activist Saliba Hamis (both activists of the ICP), Mer-Hamis embodies in many ways both the conflict and the possibilities that exist beyond the national divide. As a diverse and successful actor Mer-Hamis developed a reputation as a provocateur, but it was only in 2000, with the beginning of the *Intifada* and the events of October 2000 within Israel, that he joined the Palestinian political struggle publically, initially by joining the demonstrations and later by making the documentary *Arna's Children* (2003). In several interviews in the Israeli press Mer-Hamis explained that with the escalation of the conflict it was no longer possible for him to "sit on the fence".¹⁰⁷

The Israeli Industry and the limits of the discourse

When discussing their experiences of working within the Israeli film and television industries, filmmakers referred both to a enduring sense of deprivation and the ways in which the boundaries of the political discourse affect their work. Young filmmakers acknowledged that it has been easier to get funds in recent years, due to the transformations in the industry and some of the initiatives of the funds and broadcasters, and that there has been a considerable increase in the emergence of young talented filmmakers. Yet, they stressed that for many the industry is still out of reach and that there is still some way to go to foster cinema culture in the Palestinian community.

Tackling the issue of discrimination and referring to the discourse of Euro-modernity is often more complex than addressing the national conflict, as notions of modernity and tradition move beyond the Israeli/Palestinian national divide to the wider categories of

¹⁰⁷ See: Shalom Efrat (20.10.2002) *Tel Aviv*; Libsker, Ari (5.4.2004) *Globs*; Nemer Shmulik, (5.3.2004) *Haifa*.

East and West and their respective cultures. In relation to the internal discourse in Israel about the level of 'modernity' of its Arab population and its implications on the 'professionalism' of Palestinian filmmakers, filmmakers I interviewed expressed different views. For example, echoing some of the views expressed by funders and broadcasters, both Salim Dau and Ibtisam Mara'ana argued that Palestinian filmmaking is hindered partly by the filmmakers' working standards, which have not adapted to the Western, modern ways of working. As Dau has put it:

It is true that we have talented young people working today but their standards of working are problematic sometimes. They need to learn how to work fast and to the standards of industries like the American or the English industries. We have lots of hope for this young generation but they are not active enough in my view... they don't work at the right pace for the profession, they operate in 'desert time'.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Mara'ana said: "many of the young aspiring Palestinian filmmakers don't know how to work professionally...they think they are in the village, that everything can be sorted by personal connections, they don't know how to work through a bureaucratic process".¹⁰⁹

In an interview two years later, Ramez Kazmouz and Rokaya Sabbah claimed that standards have improved significantly in recent years and warned against a tendency to perpetuate a stigma of deprivation and professional inferiority. Kazmouz said: "in my experience when I made the film they [the New Foundation for Cinema and Television and The Second Broadcast Authority] were very impressed by the film because of its production standards, so they were very supportive of it. It's the first time that they came across a production in which all the crew was Arab and which met their quality standards".¹¹⁰ Sabbah added: "you see, they just didn't think we are capable of

¹⁰⁸ Salim Dau. Interview, Haifa, 31.3.2005.

¹⁰⁹ Ibtisam Mara'ana. Interview, Haifa, 6.9.2004.

¹¹⁰ Ramez talked extensively about the need to foster and train more professional Palestinian film crews. In the same interview he added: "one of the problems of the way Palestinian filmmaking in Israel at the moment works is the mixed crews, or that the funds give money to individual directors but the rest of the crew – the camera operator, the editor and the sound operator are all Israeli Jews and this creates problems of representation. Palestinian filmmaking here needs to be a wholesome or complete thing because the Israeli-Jew does not know and does not understand the Israeli Arab and the conflicts within our society, and this is reflected in the films. When the time comes and the Israeli-Jew will be really interested and will get to know the Israeli Arab then we can make joint films". Interview, Nazareth, 22.7.2007.

producing quality films so it took them by surprise...things have changed in recent years. There are talented and serious people that are working in filmmaking in the Palestinian community, and we want to keep it that way".¹¹¹

Some of the filmmakers noted that the limits of Palestinian filmmaking in Israel are contingent upon the limits of the Israeli industry in general; while others pointed to "the problem of reverse racism", where professional standards are being compromised for the sake of positive discrimination. For example, Suha Arraf, who has extensive experience across the industry said:

I personally never felt any discrimination against me in the film industry. My difficulties are the same as those of Jewish Israeli directors; the budgets for filmmaking are limited in Israel. Television is a different story because it is a more popular medium. Penetrating the television industry as a Palestinian is very hard because of the tyranny of the rating. Across the board there is the notion that Arabs or programmes in Arabic will never bring high rating. There was never an Arabic speaking programme or film in prime time on Israeli television and I have very little faith that there will ever be one.¹¹²

Dau and Tabari, recalling their time as students in Israel (in the 1970s and 1990s respectively), invoked the notion of reverse racism. Tabari said:

If anything, I was given too much. I was 'hugged' in ways that reeked of reverse racism. There was no criticism towards me because I was Arab and modern, I felt like shit because I am not a great talent, I just have a few things to say and wanted to learn techniques but nobody was teaching me because they loved me so much... later when I worked in *Omanut La'am* [a national fund for Arts] I felt the same. I expressed criticism of the fact that in the name of positive discrimination public funding is sometimes given to Arab art only for the sake of being Arab, regardless of professional standards or

¹¹¹ Rokaya Sabbah, interview, Nazareth, 22.7.2007.

¹¹² Suha Arraf, interview, Haifa, 13.04.2005. Arraf was born in 1969 and grew up in the village Mi'lilya in the Galilee. She studied philosophy in Haifa University, obtained an MA in Anthropology from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and studied scriptwriting in The Scriptwriting School in Tel Aviv. Arraf has been working for many years in the film and TV industry in Israel in various capacities, as editor, producer, presenter, scriptwriter and director. In Israel she directed the documentaries *Good Morning Jerusalem* (2004) and *Hard Ball* (2006), with the help of the New Foundation for Cinema and Television and Channel 2. She wrote the scripts for the successful Israeli feature films *the Syrian Bride* (Eran Riklis, 2004) and *Lemon Tree* (Eran Riklis, 2008). She also works regularly in the PA, either on film projects or for foreign broadcasters, moving quite easily between the two contexts of production (in Israel and the PA). She is currently working on a film about the women of the Hamas in Gaza.

artistic merit... When I refused to give funds to a few Arab projects my bosses insisted that I had to do so.¹¹³

Dau said:

When we studied cinema in the 1970s there was lot of public 'noise' around it, at that time the Israeli cinema and theatre needed the 'Arab character'. The reaction was always, Wow! an Arab actor or an Arab actress, it didn't matter if we knew how to play even, they always dressed us up as 'big actors' and it wasn't always justified.¹¹⁴

On the issue of the limits of the discourse, the experiences of filmmakers also varied, depending, among other things, on the content of their films, the political atmosphere at the time of making the film and the individuals involved. Some, like Arraf, Sabbah, Kazmouz, Abu-Wael, Copti, Nassar and Tannous, told me that they had a positive experience and that at no stage during the production did they feel that there was an attempt at political censorship on the part of the funders or commissioning editors. Others had different experiences, as the following examples illustrate. Mara'ana explained that:

You have to learn to work strategically when you work with the Jewish establishment. On the one hand, the establishment tries to send a message of democracy, but on the other hand it is clear that you have to say things gently; that you can't use every term...if you suddenly say 'massacre' or 'occupation' the rules of the game change. When I was making *Paradise Lost* for example, they told me I have to find another word instead of 'massacre', that it would be too alienating.¹¹⁵

Khaled Idris, who has thus far made a number of small-scale films and works primarily on some of the factual programmes in Arabic, recalled a film that he was working on which failed to materialise partly for political reasons. The film's topic was the events of October 2000, and it was funded by the Gesher Foundation. Idris said:

Although the treatment was approved, and it was clear that the film was going to convey the harsh feelings of anger and disillusionment of Palestinian youth, when it came to the

¹¹³ Ula Tabari, interview, Paris, 26.2.2006.

¹¹⁴ Salim Dau, Interview, Haifa, 31.3.2005.

¹¹⁵ Ibtisam Mara'ana interview, Rishpon, 26.7.2005.

editing stages pressures were put on me to leave out the angrier statements of some of the protagonists and convey a peaceful message of co-existence. I remember the argument with Udi Leon [the Fund director at the time]...he told me time and again 'you are too extreme, you are too focused on the conflict'.¹¹⁶

Talking about his experiences of working for the Israeli Educational Television, Nizar Hassan explained to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz:

The system works like that... they tell you go on, make a programme, do the research, work on it, we'll give you the technical support. But then slowly, slowly, they start tapping a coding system of what's allowed and what's not allowed...nobody told me for example, don't make a programme about land expropriation. On the contrary, they said Ok. But when I finished they saw it and told me 'this can not pass'. It was the same with other issues. This is how I was castrated.¹¹⁷

Recalling her experiences of working for channel 2 on a programme about women's issues (which was edited by Suha Arraf), Ula Tabari said: "During the shooting of the programme there were a few incidents when I was stopped and they asked me to stop using certain terms – like 'occupation' or 'Palestinian women'. I was asked to say 'Arab women' instead; another time they told me to stop referring to the Israeli society as if I am an outsider, they kept telling me "you are Israeli".¹¹⁸

Yet, Tabari (who as I have mentioned above resides in Paris) added that in recent years she has observed a change in the limits of the discourse:

Although I couldn't work there I recently have growing respect for some of the people who do stay. I met lots of young women recently who are studying in university there and they force their agenda, they force the subject of the *Nakba* for example... I was also impressed by the cinema school in Nazareth, because the programme is in Arabic and the curriculum is relevant to Palestinians...My impression is that in Israel now, yes, it is possible to say something, because there are so many individuals and the strategy of Israel to keep the Palestinian citizens in a state of fear doesn't work any more. They are

116 Khaled Idris, interview, Tamra, 13.4.2005. Idris worked on several television programmes in Arabic producing primarily investigative reportages that deal with social and cultural issues of the Palestinian community in Israel. He teaches at Almanar College.

117 Mendler, Nili (31.10.86) *Ha'aretz*.

118 Ula Tabari, interview, Paris, 26.2.2006.

not afraid any more... yet with this young generation some are so ignorant that they simply imitate the Israelis, they are not aware and that is a problem as well.¹¹⁹

The importance of locality: working in one's homeland

When discussing their motivation to work within Israel, many of the filmmakers emphasized the importance of being in one's own cultural and geographical landscape. An example is Ali Nassar, who studied and worked in Russia but returned to Israel in 1981. Nassar lives in his home village Arabe in the Galilee, where he was born and where his family has been living for many years.¹²⁰ The films he has made since the 1990s, especially *The Milky Way*, are all informed by his biography, drawing on childhood experiences during the years of the military government and portray, time and again, the village before its 'modernisation', which, according to Hassan, still lives vividly in his memory. Talked at length about the importance of living and creating in his home village Nassar said:

This is the core of my work. My creativity and my understanding of the world come from this place and my belonging to it... I learned a lot in those years in Moscow, it opened my eyes, I learned Russian, I love Russian culture and the language but I had to return, even though I knew that I was coming back to nothing, to a reality that is far removed from cinema¹²¹.

In various interviews in the Israeli press Nassar expressed the same view. In an interview with the newspaper Ha'aretz on the eve of *The Milky Way's* release he said "it is not easy to live here (in Israel) and this is far from being an ideal place to make films but the beauty of the Galilee, its colourfulness and the memories I have, all these are for me the Kodak of cinema".¹²²

Much in the same vein, Kasam Sha'aban, who also studied in the Soviet Union and was part of the *Al Jadid* group, said in an interview in 1986: "I work only in Israel, and there

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Arabe was positioned outside the areas of conflict during the 1948 war. As a consequence the village was not harmed and its inhabitants by and large stayed in their homes.

¹²¹ Ali Nassar, interview, Tzlil Ha'horesh café in the Galilee, 1.7.2005.

¹²² Beker, Avihai. (05.02.1999) *Haaretz*.

is a reason for this. An artist cannot develop when he works outside. The more his work is focused on things related to his local reality the more universal it can get".¹²³ Sha'aban has recently forsaken filmmaking and currently manages the Jewish-Arab theatre *Beit-Hagefen* in Haifa. In an interview with me in 2005 he talked bitterly about the difficulties of cinema production, which led him back to theatre where more funds are available, yet stressed again that with theatre, as with film or any other artistic expression, working in one's own locality is vital.¹²⁴

The renowned actors/filmmakers Mohammad Bakri and Salim Dau are another key examples. Like Nassar and Sha'aban they were born in the Galilee in the early 1950s, and their childhood was shaped by the realities of the military regime and the dominance of the ICP in the Palestinian community.¹²⁵ Both are currently leading Palestinian-Israeli actors, whose rich repertoire includes acting for theatre and cinema, performing in Arabic and in Hebrew, in Israel, in the PA and in recent years internationally as well. Since the late 1990s both Bakri and Dau have also written and directed their own films, a transition which was aided by their established acting careers and public status in Israel. Both Bakri and Dau expressed a growing frustration and despair at the political and industrial setbacks and obstacles that hinder their work in Israel but, evoking the notion of the *Summud*, stressed that for them working in Israel is important. In a press interview in 1985, Salim Dau, who had just returned to Israel after studying and working in France for a number of years, said: "I felt good in France, but at the end of the day performing for a French audience is not the same thing. I felt I want to play before an Arab audience, that I wanted to perform in Hebrew and in Arabic again, after all I belong here".¹²⁶ In the interview with me in 2005 he added: "This is also a political strategy...I belong here and just like my father who refused to sell his land,

¹²³ Brafman, Ora (5.12.1986) *Haifa*.

¹²⁴ Kasam Sha'aban, interview Haifa, 27.5.2005.

¹²⁵ Bakri was born in 1953 in the village Bayada and still resides there. Dau was born in 1951 in the village Ba'ana but the family comes from the nearby village Birwe, which was destroyed during the 1948 war.

¹²⁶ Okhovski, Gal (1.11.1985) *Ha'ir*.

when everybody else around us did, I insist on working here. This is my way of remaining loyal to this land and to my father... I will not leave my home despite it all".¹²⁷

Younger filmmakers also discussed the importance of working in one's home in terms of feelings of belonging, memories and political strategies, but they stressed contemporary cultural connections and interlinks within Israel as additional motivation. For example, Suha Arraf, who works both in Israel and the PA, moving quite easily between the two contexts of production, told me in interview: "...I grew up in Israel, I am maybe not connected to its national identity but I am connected to the culture. This is my home, this is my land and here are my memories".¹²⁸

Additional examples are younger filmmakers like Ibtisam Mara'ana, Tawfik Abu-Wael, Scandar Copti, Ramez Kazmouz, Ala Khlikhal, Anan Barakat, Rokaya Sabbah and Shady Srur. Born in the 1970s they roughly fit into the characteristics of the Third Generation in Abu-Baker and Rabinowitz typology (which I discussed in the first chapter). Their work is often deemed to be less political, more social, abstract or experimental. In interviews they all talked, in one form or another, about the wish to create a culture that emerges from, and stays loyal to, as they often termed it, 'their place' and to their contemporary life experiences as Palestinians inside Israel. For example, Abu-Wael explained that despite being acutely conscious of the need to fight the Israeli occupation he wants his work to focus on his own experiences as a Palestinian-Israeli. As he put it:

Culturally the Palestinians in Israel are also Israeli, all the Palestinians in Israel feel that but have no vehicle through which to express it ...my culture is both Palestinian and Israeli. Ramalla is not my cultural home and I have little knowledge of Gaza. It is Haifa and Acre and Jaffa that are my cultural homes.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Salim Dau, interview, Haifa, 31.3.05. Bakri expressed similar views on several occasions. In interview he said: "I sometime get to a point of such despair that I think of leaving, but I will not do it". In a public talk in London in 2006, responding to a question about working in Israel he said: "I will not leave but I am sorry to say that I sometimes ask my children to do so, they are confused. On the one hand they want to leave out of despair (of the lack of equality) on the other hand this is their home. There are better times and worse times, since the beginning of the (Al Aksa) Intifada I grow less and less optimistic and I want them to leave". London Palestinian Film Festival, 24.06.2006.

¹²⁸ Suha Arraf, interview, Haifa, 13.04.2005.

¹²⁹ Tawfik Abu-Wael, interview, 7.4.2005, Tel Aviv.

Similarly, when talking about the kind of Palestinian filmmaking that he would like to promote, Anan Barakat, who manages the AP school as well as making films himself, stressed the importance of locality, and of the need to represent the particular culture of Palestinians in Israel. He said:

The word 'authentic' is already loaded with so much that it is hard to use it, but what I am talking about is creativity that will emerge from the **real** place of the filmmakers – Nazareth for example - and would expand out. I want to see filmmaking that would be 'of the place' rather than the small-scale and inward looking which is often associated with 'local' projects.¹³⁰

Scandar Copti, who has been involved in cultural projects in Jaffa, his home town, for many years, and whose films have thus far focused on Jaffa, stressed in the interview with me that much of his motivation comes from the need to create a change "here, in Jaffa".¹³¹ In an interview for an online magazine in 2006 Copti said about his acclaimed debut feature *Ajami* (2009), which he co-directed with the Israeli-Jewish Yaron Shani, that his work moves beyond the common representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict particularly because it focuses on the locality of Jaffa. Copti explained:

This is not another story about the conflict or about Palestinians in the West Bank, which is far away, this is a story about Jaffa... a world that nobody knows despite it being so close. It is a story about different identities of Arabs and about different perspectives on the life in Jaffa... we chose to work with non-professional residents of Jaffa because what is important to us is the authenticity of the story and the language of Jaffa¹³².

While Copti works within the Israeli industry and while *Ajami* was funded by the IFF, Copti insists that the film is 'of Jaffa' and resists its classification within the boundaries of national cinemas. The issue was raised publicly, and created a great controversy in Israel, when Copti told the media on the eve of the Academy Awards ceremony, that while the film is an Israeli nominee for the Best Foreign Language Film, he does not

¹³⁰ Anan Barakat, interview, Nazareth, 23.5.2005.

¹³¹ Copti was born in Jaffa to an intellectual Christian family with a legacy of political activism. He studied engineering in Israel and is a self-trained filmmaker and video artist. Some of his projects in Jaffa are mentioned in chapter one.

¹³² Oran, Giora. (25.8.2006). *Fly on the Wall*, personal website.

represent Israel.¹³³ The controversy that Copti created following this statement demonstrates, like in the cases of *Divine Intervention* and *Paradise Now*, the shifting grounds of Palestinian cinema, and the challenges its transnational context of production poses for traditional models of national cinemas. If *Divine Intervention* was excluded from the Awards because there was no Palestinian nation state, in the case of *Ajami* the hybridity of the production could not be contained within the framework of national cinema; the film's classification as Israeli excludes its Palestinian content and its maker's identity.

Beyond the national conflict

In addition to stressing the importance of working in one's homeland, many of the filmmakers have talked about the wish to break out of 'the burden of representation', which they felt the reality of the conflict had imposed on them.¹³⁴ This tension exists in the work of all Palestinian filmmakers from different generations, inside and outside of Israel. In the interviews I conducted, both the younger and the older filmmakers expressed the wish to be able to work 'freely', on any topic, without feeling that they have to represent the Palestinian nation or contribute to the national struggle inside of Israel or in general. However, some of the younger filmmakers I interviewed believe they are more rebellious in their attempt to resist the expectation that they should deal only with the conflict. For example, Rokaya Sabbah said:

We are trying to break out the 'box' of Palestinian filmmakers. If you notice you'll see that all the older filmmakers made films about the conflict, about what we are

¹³³ To the media in Los Angeles Copti said: "You have an Israeli director and a Palestinian director; you have Israeli actors and Palestinian actors. The movie represents Israel, but I don't. I can't represent a country that doesn't represent me". Copti's statement was followed by a stormy debate in Israel. The minister of culture Limor Livnat publicly condemned it and rightwing MKs have proposed to change the Israeli cinema law to prevent funding of filmmakers who do not identify themselves with Israel. In interviews to the Israeli press, Copti said in response "I don't understand what the big fuss is about, I only said what my film clearly says and what I said many times in the past. I know I ruined the party a bit, but this is really how I feel. The state does not represent me and I don't represent it". Grinberg Shay (19.3.2010), *Ha'ir*. On the controversy, see also: Hannah Brown (9.3.2010). Analysis: Equal representation, *The Jerusalem Post*.

¹³⁴ The term 'burden of representation' has often been used in relation to art and cultural work of ethnic minorities and diasporic communities who, as Kobena Mreker puts it, "were burdened with a whole range of extra-artistic concerns precisely because...they are seen as 'representatives' who are accountable to, or speak on behalf of, their communities" (1990: 65).

‘supposed’ to deal with and I think that the younger filmmakers have now started to focus more on ‘humane stories’, which are relevant to us. Ramez is interested in women’s status, and this is the film he made. I also in my film did not deal with the conflict as such, its history or its causes. The film emerges out of a given situation.¹³⁵

Similarly, Abu Wael explained: “The problem of the Palestinian society in Israel is that it has not yet created a bohemian society of artists that would express itself. Imagine what will happen when the Palestinians start making films about any topic and will break through the constraints of the national conflict, this is how culture is created. but we are not there yet...”¹³⁶

Others connected the need to break out of the restrictions imposed by the expectation of dealing with the national conflict with the need to engage critically with cultural and political issues within Palestinian society. For example, Ali Nassar, said about the political criticism in *The Milky Way*: “the film was criticised by many Arabs for being too soft on Israel, not political enough. I was told that it is not right to deal with internal criticism when the reality of occupation and oppression still goes on. But I believe that there shouldn’t be any ‘sacred cows’ and we should start dealing with that”¹³⁷.

For many of the young filmmakers this criticism of their own society revolves around negotiating cultural difference and notions of modernity and tradition, in ways that break out of the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity. These negotiations are often explored through an engagement with issues of gender and in relation to the contemporary Palestinian space in Israel. As Mara’ana explained:

My criticism is directed more towards my own society and less towards the occupier. Although there is a direct link between the occupation and the state of the Arab society in Israel, we ourselves need to learn how to open up and discuss things freely... I want to work in Israel because for me the main audience is here – the Israeli Jews and the Arabs, I want to deal specifically with the Palestinian society in Israel...there is a need to

¹³⁵ Rokaya Sabbah, interview, Nazareth, 22. 07.2007.

¹³⁶ Tawfik Abu-Wael, interview, 7.4.2005, Tel Aviv.

¹³⁷ Ali Nassar, interview, Tzlil Ha’horesh café in the Galilee, 1.7.2005.

explain what the Arabs of 48 are going through, also on the social level, not just the political.¹³⁸

Similarly, Abu-Wael said:

I want to make films about my own culture, and I want the freedom to criticize it... historically *Thirst* is the first film that has no Israelis in it, but I live in a period where the power of this is not yet understood. I am told that the film is a-political or a-temporal but what the film is trying to do is to look on my society not through the prism of the occupation. It is true that there is Colonialist oppression but there is also oppression within my society, mainly of freedom of expression...¹³⁹

It is worth noting that the desire to break out from the restrictions of national discourses, and the emphasis of cultural interconnections, which many of the filmmakers expressed, is also manifested in their aesthetic approaches and adopted film styles. In interviews filmmakers cited a wide range of sources of influence and stylistic approaches. While some discussed their work in relation to Arab cultural conventions or to Arab cinema – for example Anan Barakat or Ala Khlikhal or Salim Dau - very few referred to Arab or Palestinian culture, art and cinema as their exclusive point of reference. Many talked about specific European and American filmmakers or styles as a source of inspiration and some even referred to Israeli/Hebrew culture as a point of reference. For example, Suha Arraf said “in my films there aren’t many words, this is the kind of cinema I like, the European, the Japanese, that has less words and less actors and more of the visual language”. Abu- Wael and Nassar cited Russian cinema as the main influence on their style and aesthetical choices. Barakat mentioned Arab filmmakers, such as Chahine, and the film diaries of the Israeli filmmaker David Perlov as a source of influence.

Conclusion

¹³⁸ Ibtisam Mara’ana interview, Rishpon, 26.7.2005.

¹³⁹ Tawfik Abu-Wael, interview, 7.4.2005, Tel Aviv.

Palestinian filmmakers who work in Israel struggle against national discrimination, oppression and cultural imperialism. In their attempt to make films about (and at times for) their own community they deal both with national aspects of Israeli colonialism and the social and cultural aspects of it. As Palestinian films are often framed within a political discourse that draws rigid dichotomies between the 'social' and the 'political' and between 'Israelis' and 'Palestinians', for many of the filmmakers there is an overriding feeling of being 'misunderstood'. While Palestinian films that are produced outside Israel, and deal overtly with the national aspects of Zionist colonialism, gain increasing international exposure within the growing festival and independent film circuits, Palestinian films that are produced inside Israel and/or deal with cultural or social aspects, experience greater difficulty in reaching audiences both in Israel/Palestine and also around the world.

One of the main tensions that underlies Palestinian filmmaking in Israel is the decision as to whether to work 'inside' or abroad. The attempt of filmmakers to examine their society critically and in separation from the discourse of the conflict, creates further tensions. Many of the filmmakers I interviewed stressed that this is a conscious choice, which is not necessarily politically unaware, despite the way those films are often described. Younger filmmakers, mainly those who belong to the third and fourth generation, emphasized multi-dimensional cultural affiliations that respond to contemporary experiences of living in Israel. As the interviews with the filmmakers illustrate, the practical experience of producing Palestinian films inside Israel draws attention time and again to the ambivalence and contradictions embedded in the Israeli political discourse, and the condition of double marginality of Palestinian citizens inside Israel. Cases of official censorship are relatively rare and the boundaries of the discourse (which terms can be used and in which contexts) are marked more subtly and often inconsistently. Filmmakers' ability to criticise Zionism is not always limited by taking Israeli funds or working within the Israeli industry.

Finally, what characterises the context of production of Palestinian films in Israel, as with Palestinian cinema in general, is fluidity and instability, which are constituted by

and respond to the political dynamics of the conflict. This is manifested in the diversity of filmmakers and institutions, which adopt different strategies; in the interstitial mode of production that shifts between Israel, the West and the PA; and in the range of topics and styles that filmmakers take on board. Nevertheless, there are common threads and shared concerns.

Chapter 4

History, Memory and Identity

One of the primary concerns of Palestinian cinema, as a project of counter representation, is the constitution of a historical counter-narrative (Said, 2006: 2; Dabashi, 2006: 10-11). In the eyes of many, this is an ongoing process which has yet to be completed, despite a growing visibility of the Palestinian political cause on the world stage (Massad, 2006; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006; Bresheeth, 2006; Said, 2006; Dabashi, 2006). The Zionist national project, as discussed in the first chapter, entailed not only the occupation of land but also the erasure of Palestinian culture and the suppression of the Palestinian historical narrative, by various mechanisms of colonisation. Set against this erasure and against the “problematic relationship of the Palestinians to the visible and the visual” (Said, 2006:2), Palestinian films aim to give a voice and an image to past events, people and places whose stories were silenced by official historiography and whose images have been absent from mainstream media and cinemas.

In the Palestinian national narrative the *Nakba* is often marked as the key formative event and the focal point around which the Palestinian historical narrative is organised (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod, 2007 :5; Litvak, 2009: 3; Tamari, 1999). Scholars of Palestinian cinema have often argued that the *Nakba*, as traumatic event, underlies Palestinian cinema and constitutes the aesthetics and modes with which Palestinian films address the past and the present (Massad, 2006; Dabashi, 2006; Bresheeth 2002a, 2006; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008). According to Dabashi (2006) “the central trauma of Palestine, the *Nakba*, is the defining moment of Palestinian cinema – and it is around that remembrance of the lost homeland that Palestinian filmmakers have articulated their aesthetic cosmovision” (11). Dabashi calls this aesthetic “traumatic realism” and claims that it is integral to the cinematic mannerism of Palestinian films – whether factual or fictive (ibid.). Joseph Massad argues (2006) that the traumatic nature of the *Nakba* prevented Palestinian cinema from producing “a thorough cinematic treatment” of the historical event (34). According to Massad:

If the Nakba as trauma, as the Palestinian traumatic experience per excellence, lies by definition outside of the circuit of representation, and therefore cannot be represented aesthetically, then it can not be missing or lacking after all. In this sense, it would seem that the very unrepresentability of the Nakba is what structured Palestinian cinema all along, which is why this cinema fails to say what it must but cannot say (ibid: 43).

Scholars such as Gertz and Khleifi and Haim Bresheeth place the trauma of the *Nakba* at the heart of their analysis of Palestinian cinema. Informed by psychoanalytical theory their analysis emphasizes the ways in which Palestinian cinema perpetuates an image of Palestinian life caught within a traumatic 'structure of experience'. According to psychologists the traumatic 'structure of experience' is characterised by belated, repeated, literal images of past events, manifesting themselves in flashbacks or dreams in the present, which possess one's mind often against one's own will (Caruth, 1995: 5). Traumatic experiences by their nature cannot be assimilated into patterns producing meaning, either chronological or causal, and thus remain only in the form of a perpetual repetition of the original event in our minds (ibid). Reading a range of Palestinian films within the framework of trauma studies Gertz and Khleifi, as well as Bresheeth, suggest that such traumatic 'structure of experience' appears in abstract and symbolic ways in Palestinian films that deal with the past, as well as in films which are seemingly set in the present.

Drawing attention to the parallels between the Jewish and Palestinian historical narratives, both constructed around a traumatic event of destruction, Gertz and Khleifi (2004 :362; 2006; 2008) claim that in Palestinian cinema trauma is manifested in the tendency to overlook the present, substituting it instead with an image of a past frozen in time. According to Gertz and Khleifi, Palestinian films tend to reproduce a dominant structure which is often fixed around three veins: the memory of paradise lost, the lament for the present and the description of the intended return to Palestine.¹⁴⁰ As they put it, in Palestinian narratives, the year 1948 "appears not as the past but as a

¹⁴⁰ Gertz and Khleifi relay here on Tamari's (1999) discussion on the Palestinian historical narrative.

present progressive dictating the direction for the future, a direction whose mere purpose is the struggle to restore the past” (2008: 127).

For example, in Gertz and Khleifi’s analysis the PLO films of the ‘revolutionary period’, which focused on contemporary assaults against the Palestinian people in exile, or films by Rashid Mashrawi, which were produced in Gaza during the 1990s and which “delineate the refugees’ here-and-now daily struggle for survival”, evoke the traumatic experience of the *Nakba* in an abstract way. In other films, such as in Michel Khleifi’s or Ali Nassar’s, the traumatic ‘structure of experience’ is revealed in the displacement of the pre-1948 past to a different time and space. According to Gertz and Khleifi, in Michel Khleifi’s films the praxis of the trauma is manifested in the way the pre-1948 past is ‘acted out’ in the filmic present, set in the 1980s.¹⁴¹ In Ali Nassar’s films trauma is manifested in a construction of an idyllic image of pre-colonial Palestinian society, penetrated by references to the *Nakba* complying with its traumatic ‘structure of experience’.¹⁴²

Informed by the same theoretical perspective Haim Bresheeth (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2007) has also suggested that Palestinian films mirror the ‘structure of experience’ of trauma.¹⁴³ According to Bresheeth (2001; 2002a; 2006) in documentaries about the 1948 war, such as *Legend (Ostura*, Nizar Hassan, 1998) and *1948* (Mohammad Bakri,

¹⁴¹ As Gertz and Khleifi (2008) put it, “what has been lost, the pre-1948 Palestinian place, its connection to nature and the land, the traditional lifestyle dominating it, the freedom of movement and action within it, are all evoked in different versions in the present. The past is imposed on the present” (83). In these examples, the memories of the pre-1948 past are brought back to life through Khleifi’s use of space, through reenactment of traditional rituals in the filmic present, or in the ways in which symbols of the lost homeland are evoked discontinuously by visual links in the contemporary life of the film’s characters.

¹⁴² Gertz and Khleifi point out that in *The Milky Way* and *In the Ninth Month* the actual time of the plot (1964 and the 1990s) seems to be irrelevant; Nassar constructs an image of a Palestinian village that is identical in both films and in which the village is the *Heimat*, a safe and close space in which a unity of man, nation and land exists. The portrayal of such a village, set in the 1990s, in *In the Ninth Month* creates a strong sense of unreliability, which reinforces even further “the traumatic perception of time standing still” (2008: 131). For this image of the village fixed in the past seems to guide Nassar’s main cinematic vision. As Nassar explained in a number of interviews, the village he created in both films is “the same village of his childhood” (quoted in Gertz and Khleifi, 2008:119). When asked about the anachronism of the image in *In the Ninth Month*, he similarly replied “this is not anachronism, nothing has changed” (ibid. :131). In an interview Nassar gave to me, in 2005, he expressed the same view.

1998), the traumatic nature of the events of the *Nakba*, and the impossibility of mourning the loss of Palestine due to the tangible presence of the land of Palestine itself, constituted a kind of stasis in the film texts, akin to the psychological state of melancholia. As in a state of melancholia, the repetitive experience of the past traumatic event in the present, does not allow a breaking out of the past, reconciliation, mourning and eventually a move forward. Like Gertz and Khleifi, Bresheeth applied the same theoretical perspective to the analysis of films that seemingly deal with the present, such as Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention*, which are set in contemporary Nazareth, and to Nizar Hassan's *Invasion* and Mohammad Bakri's *Jenin, Jenin* which are both set in contemporary Jenin. I will expand further on this argument in my discussion of these films in the following chapters.

While the analysis of Palestinian cinema from the perspective of psychoanalysis helps to illuminate several aspects of the films it contains its own limitations. Criticism of such perspective was offered recently by writers such as Terri Ginsberg (2009). When reviewing Gertz and Khleifi's book *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (2008), Ginsberg suggests that the emphasis on neurosis, stasis and trauma, which betray a "psychodramatic cartography, decontextualises the Israeli-Palestinian conflict both historically and theoretically" (318). By imposing on the reading of Palestinian cinema a conceptual framework that is in fact more relevant to Zionism and Israeli cinema, the authors draw a transhistorical symmetry between the Holocaust and the Nakba, which creates distortions in the understanding of Palestinian history and overlooks the substantial differences between the Palestinian and Israeli case. By so doing, according to Ginsberg, the book both trivializes the Palestinian experience and reduces the Palestinian struggle, ultimately exemplifying "the Zionist disavowal of Palestinian peoplehood" (320).

Ginsberg's point is also evident in other scholars' writings about Palestinian cinema. For example in recent critiques of Tawfik Abu-Wael's film *Thirst* (*Atash*, 2005) in Israeli academia. The film's narrative revolves around issues of patriarchal control and takes

place in the present, in the outskirts of the town of Um el Phahem.¹⁴⁴ While the film makes only rare and brief allusions to the national conflict, Israeli scholars tended to overlook its central subject matter and read the film as a political allegory alluding to the *Nakba*, within the framework of trauma. For example, Mital Alon-Olienik (2007) related narrative ambiguities in the film to the trauma of the Nakba, suggesting that:

The film does not provide a definitive answer to the destruction of the original home, perhaps because the answer lies in the destruction to which all Palestinian films allude - the *Nakba* of 1948. Here, the Trauma of 1948 has perhaps greater prominence and tangibility than in any other Palestinian film, especially because it is absent-present (83).

Abu-Wael himself often expressed resentment to critiques of the film as political allegory of the Nakba. In an interview with me he told that “what the film is trying to do is to look at my society not through the prism of the occupation. Just as much as the Israelis look at us through their occupying gaze, we also look at ourselves through the same gaze”.¹⁴⁵ Such examples which place the ‘Israeli praxis’ in the centre of analysis of Palestinian films illustrate a failure to read Palestinian cinema on its own terms and depoliticizes the Palestinian struggle.

Moving away from a psychoanalytical perspective, and seeking to expand on the analysis of history and memory in Palestinian cinema, this chapter examines the treatment of history and memory in the films of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Palestinian films that deal with recounting the Palestinian historical narrative are, as Bresheeth (2002a) puts it, “a strategic defensive move, a move designed to recapture ground lost to Zionism and its dominant narrative” (35). Yet, they are also potent sites through which Palestinian national identity is carved. For identities, national and others, as Stuart Hall (1992) argues, are “never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (222). In this on-going process of identity production one constantly positions oneself in relation to dominant discourse/s

¹⁴⁴ Within the film the place is not specified or named, but those who are familiar with the landscape of the area would recognise it.

¹⁴⁵ Tawfik Abu-Wael, interview, Tel Aviv, 7.4.2005.

of the past. What we call identities, Hall argues (1996), are “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (6).

My discussion focuses on reading the films in relation to the socio-political context of Palestinians in Israel. I consider the films’ engagement with the political culture of Palestinians in Israel and their political ‘intervention’ within the Israeli discourse. Such a reading puts the emphasis beyond the function of the films as constructing a counter-narrative to that of Zionism, on the ways in which narratives of the past in those films construct identity positions that interrogate the Palestinian collective and the ‘place’ of Palestinians in Israel within it.

I consider a range of films produced between the late 1990s to 2006. Some of the earlier films, such as *Legend, 1948* and *The Milky Way* have been the subject of extensive academic analysis. I have already made reference to some of this analysis and will refer to it further in the following pages. More recent films have not been examined in depth before. In considering those examples I use Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker’s generational typology, which was discussed in the first chapter, rather than following a chronological model. I use this typology here since it was proven useful in thinking through a shift that I identified in the films I examined, however I use it loosely and do not intend to make a more general sociological claim regarding Palestinians in Israel or their cinema.

This chapter therefore compares the treatment of history in films made by older filmmakers (belonging to the sociological ‘second generation’) with the films of younger filmmakers (belonging to the sociological ‘third generation’). Theoretically, I use Naficy’s distinction between different types of accented filmmakers and Stuart Hall’s observations about different stages of identity formation and counter-politics in an attempt to explain this shift.

Counter-Narratives: the Nakba in the films of ‘Second Generation’ Palestinians in Israel

Counter-narratives of Palestinian history were a prominent concern of the first Palestinian films that were produced inside Israel during the 1990s. Films such as *Legend* (Ostura, Nizar Hassan, 1998) and *1948* (Mohammad Bakri, 1998) were early examples of documentaries produced by Israeli film funds which dealt directly with the memory of the *Nakba*. A more recent film, *Keys* (*Mafatih*, Salim Dau, 2002), produced with the aid of the Rabinowitz film fund, engaged with recounting the experiences of the *Nakba* in modes which resemble *Legend* and *1948*. Ali Nassar's fiction film *The Milky Way* (Darbo-t-Tabbanat, 1997) focuses on a Palestinian village inside Israel in the early 1950s, during the military regime, but as I have already noted, alludes also to the memory of to the pre-1948 Palestine and the *Nakba*.

Nassar, Bakri, Dau and Hassan belong, broadly speaking, to the second sociological generation of Palestinian citizens, if we use Abu-Baker and Rabinowitz's typology.¹⁴⁶ Their childhood was shaped by the military regime, and they came of age at a time when organised political mobilization in Israel started to form under the ICP and within national organisations. The films, all funded primarily by Israeli film funds, mark the shift in the production context of Palestinian films in Israel that I described in the previous chapter.

Importantly, these films emerged at a political time, which in hindsight can be referred to as the 'Oslo period'; a period that stretches between the establishment of the PA and the *Al Aksa Intifada* and which was seen, despite constant setbacks, as a peace in-process.¹⁴⁷ The films' production in this particular time, I suggest, should also be considered in relation to the emergence of a post-Zionist politics and culture, within which new historiography, particularly of the 1948 war, started to be formed (Pappé, 1993; 2005).¹⁴⁸

Official historiography of the 1948 war, which was for many years governed by a Zionist perspective, denied and suppressed experiences and accounts of the occurrences during

¹⁴⁶ Hassan who was born in 1960s, is younger than Nassar, Bakri, Dau who were born in the early 1950s.

¹⁴⁷ Salim Dau's film was released in 2003, technically after the 'Oslo period' was over, but the film was in production for a few years and its budget was approved before the second Intifada.

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of the post-zionist popular culture in Israel during the 1990s see: Pappé (2005).

the war within the living memory of many Palestinians. The devastating effects of the loss of their homeland, of displacement, exile and colonisation, hindered the emergence of a coherent Palestinian counter-narrative of the war (Said 2000; Khalidi, 2001; Mna'a, 1999; Gertz and Khleifi, 2008). Inside Israel, the Zionist historical narrative began to be contested by Israeli academics from within Israeli Universities since the late 1980s. Scholars such as Beni Moris, Ilan Pappé, Uri Ram and others published their first historical researches discounting the official Israeli history of the war. This New History, as it became known in Israel, which was based largely on archival material that was previously closed to public inspection, exposed facts about tactics, causes and effects of Israeli actions before and during the war which did not comply with the official Israeli version, either of the war itself or of the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict in general (Pappé, 1993).

While the extent to which the New History affected the dominance of the Zionist ideology (or politics) is debatable, its emergence brought the debate into the Israeli public discourse and legitimised to some extent Palestinian accounts of the war. Seeing the films within this context – of the emergence of post-zionist discourse within Israel - perhaps explains the willingness of the Israeli funds to support films about the *Nakba*, as well as the fact that these films were generally regarded as legitimate utterances within the Israeli discourse. Using Bhabha's terminology, the films' context of production, and their exhibition, inside Israel were acts of political intervention: they infiltrate the Israeli public sphere, with 'denied knowledge', that aims to destabilise the Zionist narrative of the war.

Legend, 1948 and Keys excavate and give voice to stories of individual families and to fragments of memory, which have thus far been silenced, by presenting a polyphony of oral testimonies, primarily of those who personally experienced the *Nakba*. These are mostly ordinary people, from different villages and towns, who were attacked, who feared and fled, whose villages and homes were destroyed and who found themselves, in the aftermath of the war, banished from their homeland. The testimonies are

detailed and personal: the protagonists talk about particular people, places, dates, numbers of soldiers and routes of escape.

All three films are narrated by the filmmakers, whose voice and presence on camera guide us through these collections of testimonies. The films resemble one another in their aesthetic approach. The oral testimonies are 'supported' by visible evidence. The protagonists present the cameras with maps, documents and photos of a world that is now lost, and the cameras linger on them. The locations are often the sites of the protagonists' historic hometowns and villages. We see them pointing to relics, fields and trees while describing in detail what was there before. At times we even see them literally excavating evidence of what lies beneath: an old grave or a pile of stones, the remains of old houses. The camera privileges the land and its flora: wide shots of the landscape and detailed and lingering shots of the natural plants and trees of the area, such as figs, olives and prickly pears (Sabras).



The *Sabra* plants growing at the site of the destroyed village in *Keys*

The symbolic meanings of these images, which are common in Palestinian narratives, emphasise the Palestinians' natural belonging and connection to their land (which is often discussed by the protagonists). The plants, and especially the Sabras – which were appropriated by the Zionist discourse to symbolise the nature of the New Jew tough and

prickly outside but soft and sweet inside – are often seen growing wild in the bare landscape, or amongst the relics.¹⁴⁹ Following the Zionist appropriation of the Sabra as a symbol, it acquired a symbolic meaning in Palestinian culture, metaphorically equated to the Palestinians' *Sumud*, steadfastness in the face of the Zionist aggression (Regev, 2001).¹⁵⁰

Importantly, the structure of the three films is fractured and the testimonies are left uncontextualised. While attempting to present a historical counter-narrative, the films do not present a linear structure that typifies the meta-narratives of official history. This is grassroots history, told from below; its episodic non-linear structure mirrors the dispersed condition of the Palestinian people and is typical of other examples of counter-cinemas (such as Third Cinema, accented and minority cinemas or Feminist cinema).¹⁵¹ As Haim Bresheeth (2002a) noted, this form of narrative un-clarity is an important departure from normative documentary practice and a clear indication of its exilic and 'interstitial' structure" (30). In many ways, the three films demonstrate Dabashi's more general claim about Palestinian documentaries. As Dabashi (2006) wrote:

What we witness in Palestinian documentaries is not a plain act of certifying a past history [but] a certain fear of loss, a worrisome look at the historical evidence, and keeping a sustained record of an endangered memory...most Palestinians who are interviewed in these documentaries are old people, evidence of memory on the edge of disappearance. What factually emerges in these documentaries...is almost secondary to the urgent necessity of preserving the fading memory of the of a people and their material culture (11-12).

All three films contain autobiographical elements, but they are subtle and implicit. The filmmakers weave their own personal stories into the other testimonies, making their

¹⁴⁹ *Sabra* was the name given to the first generation that was born in Israel. Although an archaic term, it is still in use occasionally in reference to born and bred Israelis (as opposed to new Jewish immigrants).

¹⁵⁰ The Sabra growing in the wild is often a 'natural mark' of the destroyed Arab villages. Where the Sabra grows now used to be a habitat. For discussion on the symbol of the *Sabra* in recent Palestinian painting see: Kamal Bulata (1990) "Israeli and Palestinian Artists: Facing the Woods", *Kav* 10, pp. 170-175.

¹⁵¹ While such a structure is common in Palestinian films that deal with history, the recent film *The Land Speaks Arabic* (Maryse Gargour, 2008) deviates from this mode and attempts to present a coherent, linear historic argument about early Zionism and Palestine.

private history part of the collective story of Palestine. Through telling these historical narratives the films constitute the Palestinian national narrative. They redraw the links between Palestinians in exile and those in Israel and reconstitute through that the Palestinian collective; yet, they bring to the fore the story of the internal exile of the 'Arabs of 48' and the experiences of Palestinians in Israel.

1948 focuses on the war itself and counters two of the fundamental myths of the Zionist historiography of the war. According to the official Zionist narrative, the war was a war of Independence of the few (the Jews) against the many (seven Arab armies). The Palestinians' exile is explained as a result of advice given to the Palestinian population by Arab leaders. The official history did not recount acts of deportation or killings of civilians by Israeli soldiers. In fact, the Israeli Army prided itself on its high morality and ethics, and this is an important part of the self-perception of the Israeli collective.¹⁵²

The film includes interviews with Palestinians from different places, such as the cities of Jerusalem and Jaffa, the villages Saffouri, Dir Yassin, El Bania, Emmanous and Ikrit, some still in their hometowns some in exile. Amongst the interviewees is the famous poet Taha Mohammad Ali, whose poems are now part of the Palestinian national canon. All of these relate personal experiences of the war: talking about the aggression of the Israeli army and the betrayal of Arab leaders, many talk about the fear that led them to flee and the horrors of that escape. The film's protagonists are not only Palestinians. Bakri interviews also Jewish-Israelis, primarily an ex-general who was involved in conquering some of the villages featured in the film and the novelist Amos Keinan.¹⁵³ Both the veteran general and Keinan discount the Zionist narrative, supporting the testimonies of the Palestinian protagonists and reveal the level of Israeli planning involved in the deportation of the villagers.

¹⁵² For an elaborate discussion of the new history of the 1948 war see: Pappé, Ilan, 1993; 2005.

¹⁵³ The film also includes a brief interview with an Israeli family who lives in one of the Jewish settlements that were built on the distracted Arab village Ikrit.

Bakri, a well-known actor in Israel, includes in the film extracts one of his most famous plays *The Oppsimist* (also known in English as *The Pessoptimist*).¹⁵⁴ The play functions in many ways as the narration of the film, the film opens and ends with clips from the play and extracts of it are slotted between the interviews. Based on the novel by the renowned Palestinian writer Emile Habibi, a leftist intellectual who was one of the leaders of the Israeli Communist Party, *The Oppsimist* (1974) is a satirical account of the life of Palestinian citizens of Israel.¹⁵⁵ At the centre of the novel (and the play) is the character of Sayid abu el-Nahs, who in a tragi-comic tone reflects on the events of the *Nakba* and his subsequent life under the Israeli regime.¹⁵⁶ Through Sayid's story, the novel depicts the despair of Palestinians who became citizens of Israel in the face of the on-going marginalisation and oppression they experienced and tackles one of the most painful issues with which the community struggles: the lack of resistance to the Israeli rule of the first generation of Israeli citizens. Sayid's character represents the generation of the *Nakba*, the *survivors*; paralysed by fear and driven by an urge to survive he is portrayed as defeated and weak. While cynically mocking his occupiers in private, he does not dare to face up to them and ends up collaborating with the regime. The novel, and Bakri's theatrical adaptation, became a milestone in both Palestinian and Israeli culture, and the character of Sayid - the Opssimist - became an iconic figure. An indication of that can be found in Prof. Ramzi Sliman's speech on the occasion of the 10th anniversary to Emile Habibi's death. Entitling his talk "On the "Opssimist, His Sons and Grandsons", Sliman said:

In every one of us, the Palestinians in Israel, lives the Opssimist who tries to survive. In some more than others. It is he who tries to provide for his family, to save what's left of his dignity as a human being, to rebuilt a house that was destroyed and to draw, time

¹⁵⁴ The play's title *The Oppsimist* refers to the blend of optimism and pessimism that the main character embodies.

¹⁵⁵ Habibi was a unique public figure whose writings were embraced both in Israel (and the Israeli establishment) and in the Arab world. As a founder of the ICP, he was a member of the Knesset between 1953 and 1972. In 1990 he won the important Palestinian literary prize *Al Kuds*, and in 1992 the Israeli literature prize. Habibi was born in Haifa in 1921 and remained there after 1948. His decision to stay in Haifa under Israeli rule underlined his political standpoint. He died in 1996 in Haifa and requested that the inscription on his tombstone would be: "I remained in Haifa".

¹⁵⁶ The word *Nahs* in Arabic means misfortune and is one of the Arabic words commonly used in colloquial Hebrew. Literally translated the character's name is: 'Happy' (Sayid) the 'father of misfortune' (Abu al-Nahs).

and again, the outlines of an erased memory...what is it that keeps the Opssimist alive within us and our parents and our sons? I will say it in a single word – Fear!.¹⁵⁷

As I mentioned before, Bakri narrates the film through the character of Sayid, the generic Arab of '48, rather than through his own personal perspective. Bakri's home village features in the film, and his father Salah Bakri is one of the interviewees but this is not stated in the film and remains to be noticed only by those in the know. By so doing, Bakri reinforces the collective aspect of the story he tells: the story of Palestinians in Israel. Through the character of Sayid (particularly in the extracts that Bakri chooses to include) he is able to question implicitly, rather than criticize explicitly, the older generation's reaction to the war and to the new Zionist regime. The questions seem to hover over the film, they are reflected in the way the different interviewees refer time and again to the fear (and specifically to the 'fright campaigns' led by the Israeli army) which caused them to leave their homes, as if attempting to justify it to an unseen jury, or reply to a question that is not asked.

Thus, beyond giving a voice to these experiences of the war, which present an alternative historical narrative, the film touches on a key internal debate regarding the Palestinians' strategies of resistance. Sayid's character, for all his unattractive traits, is the one that remained in his homeland. Like Bakri who plays him and Habibi who wrote of him he embodies the strategy of the *Sumud*, standing in opposition to the narratives of escape and exile. Habibi's novel, written in 1974, was instrumental in drawing attention to the destiny of Palestinians in Israel, and to the formation of the notion of *Sumud* as resistance. Bakri, for whom Habibi is his spiritual father, follows the same vein in 1998.

Keys focuses on the issue of land expropriation and the internal exile of Palestinians in Israel. Similar to Bakri in *1948*, Dau, also a famous actor, travels the country to meet with protagonists from villages and towns such as Mgdal, Shaab, Sagara, Ba'ana, Khitin, Biram, Safouri and others. Together with his interviewees he visits the sites of their ruined villages, relics of their homes or the new modern Jewish towns that were built on

¹⁵⁷ Sliman's talk was published in *Ha'aretz* on 01.06.2006.

top of them, where the protagonists excavate evidence of Palestinian life before the *Nakba*.

Beyond the film's function as a counter-narrative to that of Zionism, exposing evidence - that is far from being common knowledge - of Israeli policies of destruction and land expropriation, it engages with the issue of Palestinian collective memory. Much of what is discussed by the protagonists relates to the preservation of historic Palestine in the private and collective memory. The title of the film *Keys* refers to the common practice of many Palestinians to keep the keys to the houses they left during the war, regardless of the fact that many of these houses no longer exist. Several of the protagonists present the keys to the camera and discuss the need to keep them. In the Palestinian national discourse, the practice itself, and the symbol of the key, became a metaphor of Palestinian resistance to accepting the Zionist occupation, and to the steadfastness with which they preserve Palestine.¹⁵⁸ Dau's narration of the film is also about memory. It consists of fragments of his memory of himself as a child listening to his mother telling him about Palestine before 1948. His mother's family and the ruins of her village, Birwe, are featured in the film and provide its autobiographical element.

In *Keys* historic Palestine which is alluded to in the protagonists' stories and Dau's narration is an idyllic place tinged with nostalgia for a nature-man unity. For example, at some point in the film Dau's narration says:

Once I traveled with my mother to Acra... my mother looked at the olive grove that stretched along the Zfat-Acra road and told me: 'these are the olive trees of your grandfather my son. Here they are. We used to pick the olives every year. You would see here, amongst the trees, all the people of the village gathering for the pick. One would start singing and another would follow. You would see all the people happy, like in a holiday.

¹⁵⁸ As Haim Bresheeth points out there is a disagreement about the reading of the practice of 'taking the keys' in refugees' narratives. Some see that as nostalgia, others as a gesture prompting the memorizing of the old home as a story to be told. For a wider discussion of the topic see Bresheeth's reference to Seed P. The Key to the House in Naficy (ed.) (1999) *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place*, London: Routledge. (2002: 30).

Similarly, the present is hardly talked about and the future is talked about in terms of restoration of what was lost as manifested in the song that one of the protagonists sings in Biram: “to Biram we return to erase the term ‘refugee’. There is no other way, times will be as they were again”.

The film’s primary concern with collective memory, and the need to preserve it, is revealed in Dau’s references to his own ‘remembering’ process, of which the film is an integral part, in the camera’s focus on objects of memory (such as the keys, self-drawn maps, models of the old homes, old doors that were taken etc) and more explicitly in the films’ final scene. The film ends with one of the old protagonists sitting with his wife in a field that was once his, talking about the days of his youth and exclaiming: “I have a good memory, you know”. The old man leads his wife through the bare field and picks some berries for her from the Mulberry tree that was left to grow wild. In the following shot, which echoes the film’s opening shot, we see Dau driving through the landscape while saying in voice over “I wonder who will keep the keys of the house that is destroyed today”. The events of the present are perceived as a repetition of the past and the command is to remember.

Legend depicts the story of one Palestinian family, the Nigims, from the (now-destroyed) town of Saffouri in the Galilee. Hassan, the filmmaker, brings the entire family together for the first time since 1948. Family members arrive from Germany and Jordan at the family’s house, which is now in Nazareth, where Hassan arranges them in a circle in front of the camera to tell the history of the family. The story of the *Nakba* is told by Um Saleem, the mother. The setting Hassan creates – positioning the family in a circle around Um Saleem, gives the impression that Um Salim is telling the story not only to the camera but to her children and grandchildren as well. This collective interview is the backbone of the film. Narrating the film, Hassan intercuts between the collective interview of the family and interviews with the individual family members in Israel, in Germany and in Jordan.

While *Legend*, unlike *1948* and *Keys*, tells the story of only one family, the story of the Nigim family - a story of displacement, of living in exile and under occupation and of the constant struggle to reunite the family - encapsulates the collective story of the Palestinian nation. The story, much like the town of Saffouri itself “serves an iconic function”, as Haim Bresheeth (2002a) noted, “it stands for the story of Palestine” and is used as “a mean to explore the lost Heimat” (27). As in *1948* and *Keys*, the film’s structure is non-linear. The story of the family, a rather complicated tale by virtue of the political circumstances, unfolds in a non-chronological and disjointed way and is further problematised by Hassan’s editing. Bresheeth, who discusses the centrality of the practice of story telling to *Legend* and *1948*, as well as to other Palestinian films, argues that Hassan’s particular editing technique is self-reflexive, telling the historical narrative and problematising the possibility of telling a story at the same time. As Bresheeth (ibid) puts it this is “a text at war with itself” (30).

If *Keys* focused on land expropriation and memory and *1948* on the war itself, *Legend* focuses on the experience of displacement, more specifically of families torn apart by the war and of the struggle to reunite since. The complicated story of the Nigim family, which is not untypical of the Palestinian experience, is recounted in the film. The story starts with the *Nakba*. When the Israeli airplanes bomb Saffouri, all the family members, apart from the grandfather Musa el-Kahlil, leave town. The grandmother Amneh, her daughter Khadeegh, her son Abu-Salim, his pregnant wife Fatme and their two children Salim and Khadra escape, initially to nearby villages, but as rumours start to spread that the Jews are massacring Arabs, they continue to flee north and finally cross the border into Lebanon. There, like many other Palestinian refugees, they are moved to the Baalbek refugee camp. Nine months later Amneh decides to return to Saffouri. She sneaks back to Israel with her daughter and grandson Salim, only to discover that their home in Saffouri is no longer habitable. Having resolved to stay in their hometown, they shelter for a few years in a local convent. A few months after Amneh left Baalbek, Abu-Salim’s nuclear family (which now includes the newborn Muhmood) also sneak back to Saffouri. They spend three and a half years in the convent, during which another son, Yousef, is born, but since they are illegal infiltrators they are eventually caught by the

Israeli authorities and expelled, this time to the Jordanian border, from where they find their way to the Irbid refugee camp. Years pass, but the pain of living away from Salim and from Palestine never stops tormenting Abu Salim and Fatmeh.

In the years following the war Saffouri was gradually destroyed. An Israeli Jewish *Moshav*, Tzipori, was established in place of the old Arab town along with a heritage site that commemorates the Jewish settlement during Roman times.¹⁵⁹ Since the family's patriarch Musa el-Kahlil stayed within Israel's borders at the end of the war, he was given Israeli citizenship. By virtue of his citizenship, Amneh, aunt Khadeeja and Salim (who Amneh claimed to be her son) were also granted Israeli citizenship some years later. Separated from his nuclear family, raised by his grandmother and aunt in a closed convent at the heart of an old town under destruction, Salim the boy is sent to study in Kaduri, which was at the time the most prestigious education institute in Israel, the epitome of Zionist education where many of the elite of Israel received their education.¹⁶⁰ Saeed spends his youth as the only Arab amongst Jews, receiving the best of Zionist education, and later becoming a teacher at the similarly elitist institution, Ben Shemen.

With the passage of time, the family leaves the convent and settles in Nazareth. Salim, who becomes the head of the family, dedicates his life to reuniting the family. He applies to the Israeli authorities for 'family reunification' but is rejected time and again. Finally, with the help of Jewish friends and using his status as a teacher in *Ben Shemen*, he meets with the former MP Shimon Peres, who promises to look into the matter. Shortly afterwards he is contacted by the authorities who offer to grant him the permission on the condition that he removes his brothers, Youssef and Mahmood, from the application. Salim agrees and in 1973 his parents and young sister are permitted to return to Nazareth (but not to become citizens). His brothers are left in the refugee camp in Jordan.

¹⁵⁹ During the first and second century Tzipori was an important town of Jewish scholarship. In 1956 the Israeli authorities destroyed the remaining houses of the old Arab town and established Tzipori.

¹⁶⁰ For example, Israel's former Prime Minister Izhak Rabin is one of *Kaduri's* graduates. In the film Salim takes Hassan to *Kaduri* and proudly shows to the camera the photos of its graduates that are exhibited along the school's corridors.

Beyond the personal circumstances of the family, the film subtly charts, through the different experience of the three brothers, the different strategies of Palestinian resistance, and the internal debate surrounding these strategies within the Palestinian collective. Mahmood lives in the Western Diaspora, and aligns himself with the PLO. For him return to Palestine through the 'family reunification' route means acceptance and cooperation with Zionism. Yousef lives in Jordan. After years of living in a refugee camp he decided to accept a plot of land from the Jordanian government and build a permanent house. In the Palestinian discourse of resistance, the act of accepting the plot of land means surrendering to the existence of the occupation, a move which is opposed by many and which Yousef himself is compelled to justify to Hassan. Salim, who grew up in Israel, and in many ways within the Zionist establishment, resonates with the character of The Opssimist. His assimilation into Israeli Jewish society on the one hand and his Palestinian identity on the other give rise to internal contradictions that the film draws attention to time and again, including the allegation that he is a collaborator.

Hassan's narrative subtly exposes the ways in which Israeli colonialism positioned the brothers, and their respective political standpoints, one against the other. In addition to recounting the family's tale, the film is engaged with another topic. Throughout the film Hassan poses the three brothers questions about Mahmood's alleged involvement in one of the PLO's actions during the 1970s. At various points he presents a newspaper clipping from the 1970s, showing a photograph of PLO members, and asks the brothers to identify whether the man in the picture is Mahmood. Yousef avoids answering. Unlike Mahmood, who openly discusses his politics, Yousef is very cautious not to associate his brother with the PLO (although by the time of the filming in 1998 the PLO was recognised as the legitimate leadership of the Palestinian people). Yousef's caution is perhaps a reflection of the fear that still rules the lives of many Palestinians in Jordan. There, like in Israel, supporting the Palestinian national cause was for many years seen by the regime as a subversive act. Later in the film it is revealed that this may have prevented Mahmood from reuniting with his family. Salim, who saw the photo in the newspaper in the 1970s, thought the man was Mahmood. Fearing that he might become

a suspect in the eyes of the Israeli authorities, he voluntarily informed the Israeli intelligence that his brother was the one in the photograph and that he may be involved with the PLO activity. Towards the end of the film Mahmood finally reveals that it is not him in the photograph.

Legend not only exposes the pain of separation and dreams of reunion, but also the contemporary tensions between the factions of the family (and implicitly of the Palestinian nation at large). Like *1948*, the film emphasises the experience of the Palestinians in Israel, through its focus on Salim. Similarly, while the film raises questions of resistance and collaboration by proxy (juxtaposing Salim's strategy of survival and Mahmood's alliance with the armed struggle), Hassan does not confront Salim explicitly.

The Milky Way and *In the Ninth Month* are both set in a Palestinian village in the Galilee, and their plots revolve around strategies of coping with the Israeli rule. As in the documentaries I discussed (but in a much more simplistic manner), the films set up sets of binary oppositions between resistance and collaboration, silence and action, memory and loss of memory. In *The Milky Way*, this is manifested through the central conflict between the character of the blacksmith, Mahmud, who guards the purity both of the collective (the nation) and of the private (the family), and the corrupt Mukhtar's son who both collaborates with the Israelis and has lost the traditional values associated with family honour. In *In the Ninth Month* resistance is embodied by the brother, who is an active fighter and had to escape to Lebanon, while his younger brother, who does not rebel, stays in the Galilee. Furthermore, depicting the present life in the village as an image of the past standing still, as I discussed before, can also be seen as referencing the *Sumud*; it is a form of resistance to accept the occupation but also gestures to the future-orientated, progress-led perception of time that is imposed by the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity.

In various ways, both the documentaries discussed here and the fiction films of Ali Nassar are sites within which Palestinian national identity is reshaped primarily

through the dimension of collective memory, and within that, in subtle ways, the filmmakers' own personal memory and identity are reshaped. The films function as sites through which the filmmakers come to 'remember' their roots and mediate this both to Palestinian and Israeli audiences. In *Keys* Dau refers to that directly in the film's narration, talking about coming to remember his mother's stories. *The Milky Way* transfers the burden of remembering to the mad *Mabruc* and *Jamila*, who play the role of the village idiots. This common narrative device allows Nassar to express through them thoughts about Palestinian history and identity that he cannot express through sane characters. *Mabruc* and *Jamila* represent the Palestinian community in Israel, they are the ones that remember the Nakba but they are also the ones that signify hope, and by so doing, outline, as in *Keys*, the need to remember. In *Legend*, by staging the act of telling the story of the Nigim family in the way he did (the family gathering together to hear the mother tell the story) Nizar Hassan references his own childhood memory (Bresheeth, 2001a). In an interview with Tal Ben-Zvi Hassan says:

My clearest meeting with the Palestinian history as a story, a narrative, and not as a collage of isolated incidents, I owe to my mother. I am part of the third generation of our national trauma of 1948, so I did not experience those events personally.... I was six or seven years old - and my mother took us to our bedroom. She sat on the bed and we three sat in a circle around her (which is what gave me the idea for the central scene in *Legend*, in which Um Salim tells her story) - I only remember her telling the story without any tragic note, without victimhood, but with a dramatic sense of survival... we went to bed, and for the first time in my life I felt grown up... I understood that I live in my homeland, Palestine, that I belong, Here.¹⁶¹

Hassan's childhood memory, of being told about the history and through this finding an identity position, touches on the primary concern of many of the films of younger Palestinian filmmakers in Israel. As I will discuss in the following section, what Hassan only alludes to in an interview about the film, turns into the core of the films of the younger generation.

¹⁶¹ Appeared in English in Bresheeth (2001a: 31-32). The original interview appeared in Hebrew in Tal Ben Zvi (1999) "I and only I will tell my story" *Plastika* 3, pp. 75-81.

Private Investigations: national identity and young Palestinian filmmakers in Israel

Once, our history teacher in Tira asked if anyone in the class knew what Palestine was, and nobody did, including me. Then he asked with contempt if any of us have ever seen a Palestinian, and Mohammad the Fatso, who was afraid of having his knuckles rapped, said he'd once been driving with his father in the dark and they'd seen two Palestinians. That day, the history teacher rapped every single one of us on the knuckles, launching his attack with Mohammad the Fatso. He whacked us with his ruler, ranting, "We are Palestinians, you are Palestinians, I am Palestinian! You idiots, you animals, I'll teach you who you are!"

Dancing Arabs (Sayed Kashua, 2002)¹⁶²

More recent films that were produced in Israel, which were made by younger directors, have also dealt with national identity and history, yet, I argue, in ways that differ from the films of Bakri, Hassan, Dau and Nassar. These younger filmmakers belong to the third sociological generation in Abu-Baker and Rabinowitz's typology. This is the generation that was described as being more individualistic and confident, and whose politics is marked by ambivalence and conflict. Historically further removed from the events of the *Nakba*, and the military regime, its cultural references, by and large, are more hybrid.

¹⁶² *Dancing Arabs* was Kashua's debut novel, written in Hebrew, it was popular amongst Jewish and Arab readers. The novel is semi-autobiographical and tells the coming of age story of a boy from Tira, one of the Arab towns in the area known as the Triangle in central Israel, who spent his youth in a Jewish boarding school. The novel's themes revolve around national and cultural identity.

Generally speaking, if the films of Bakri, Hassan, Dau and Nassar fit models of exilic films, in their emphasis on memory and on the space of historic Palestine, then the films of the younger directors fit better into Naficy's category of postcolonial identity films. Naficy makes a distinction between three types of accented filmmakers: exilic, diasporic and postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmakers. Each type is characterized by a different emphasis on the relationship to space, and thus create differently accented films. According to Naficy (2001), "Exilic cinema is dominated by its focus on there and then in the homeland, diasporic cinema by its vertical relationship to the homeland and by its lateral relationship to the diaspora communities and exigencies, and postcolonial ethnic and identity cinema by the exigencies of life here and now in the countries that the filmmakers reside" (15). As a result of their emphasis on the here and now, according to Naficy, "postcolonial identity films tend to deal with...the conflict between descent relations, emphasizing bloodline and ethnicity, and consent relations, stressing self-made, contractual affiliations. In other words, while the former is concerned with being, the latter is concerned with becoming" (ibid.).

When talking about the possibilities of counter-politics in relation to second generation Black-British, Stuart Hall (1991) suggested that effective counter-politics should be politics that works *from* a position and *through* difference. Hall describes a three-phase process in relation to the construction of Black identity in Britain during the 1980s. First there was the attempt to assimilate into British society, but when these marginal communities were blocked out and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation they had to find some other roots on which to stand and had to try to discover who they were. The second phase that followed is what Hall calls "the imaginary political re-identification and re-territorialization" (52). This was "the necessary phase of recovery of lost histories...the histories that have never been told about ourselves that we could not learn in schools, that were not in any books, and that we had to recover" (ibid.). According to Hall (ibid.), without the second phase of 'finding the roots', counter-politics cannot be formed. Yet, *effective* counter-politics can only be formed when the next step is undertaken, one that Hall described as finding a political

position from which to speak. This is a political position that goes beyond the recovery of lost histories, recognizes hybridities and addresses the difficulties and the complexities of diasporic communities.

There are several important differences between the conditions of the Black community in Britain and those of Palestinians in Israel, as I hope my discussion in chapter one established. Nevertheless, I found that Hall's three-phase description of the process of identity formation and counter-politics can be useful in thinking through the shifts in the films that were made by Palestinian citizens of Israel more recently. If the films of the 'second generation' can be thought about as complying with Hall's second phase, that of 'finding the roots' and 'recovering lost histories', then the films that I am about to discuss, which were made by younger filmmakers, mark perhaps a move towards a third phase - a search for a position from which to speak.

Applying Naficy's and Hall's distinctions, I suggest that the films of young Palestinians in Israel deal with the process of becoming, documenting in many ways their process of 'searching for an identity', and, politically, their search for a subject position from which to speak. Emerging many times from a subject position of ambivalence, the quintessential quality of all the films is the experience of asking questions and bringing the issues to the surface. They deal with similar issues to those of the films of Bakri, Nassar, Dau and Hassan: strategies of resistance, the culture of fear, silence and collaboration. However, they tend to be more explicitly autobiographical: what was subtle and implicit in the films of the former, becomes explicit and turns into the organizing principle of the films of the latter. The filmmakers rarely assume a representative role themselves, or assign themselves to '*speak for*' or '*give voice to*'; these are in many ways - as Ula Tabari's film title suggests - '*private investigations*'.

Ashes (Ramad, Rima Essa, 2001), *Paradise Lost (Al-fardus al-mafqud*, Ibtisam Mara'ana, 2001) and *Private Investigation (Khaliqna wa-aliqna*, Ula Tabari, 2003), three autobiographical documentaries by young women filmmakers, share much in common. Narrated by the filmmakers themselves, the three films are structured around the

personal investigations that the filmmakers conducted into their upbringing. They confront family members, teachers, colleagues and townspeople with direct and difficult questions. Positioning themselves, on-screen and off-screen, in relation to their different protagonists, the filmmakers rework their own identities, interweaving gender, national and cultural elements of them.

Ashes, Rima Essa's documentary, began as her graduation project at the prestigious Sam Spiegel film school in Jerusalem, and later received the support of the Rabinowitz fund for final editing and distribution. Since its release in 2001 it has been screened mainly at film festivals both in Israel and around the world. The film is structured around the intimate conversations between the filmmaker and her mother about the home village Biram (which also featured in *Keys*). The Arab-Christian village Biram in the Galilee, the home of Essa's parents, was evacuated during the 1948 war and its residents transported to other villages in the area, most of them now within the borders of Israel. During the evacuation the Israeli authorities promised that the villagers would be able to return to Biram after the war, but the promise was never kept and the village was destroyed a few years later. The lands of the village are currently shared by a number of Jewish *Kibbutzim* (collectives) and villages. As in the case of Saffouri, the Israeli Nature Reserve Authority has turned the ruins of the old village into a historic national park, commemorating ancient Jewish settlements under the Roman Empire. This historical information about the village is revealed early in the film, partly in a rolling caption and partly as Essa and her mother visit the ruins of the village. What becomes the core of the film is not the historic tale itself, but the competing narratives of the Israeli state and the exiled villagers *as well as* that of Essa and her mother.

At first glance the film resembles *1948*, *Keys* and *Legend*, Essa takes her mother to the site of the destroyed village and asks her to tell the story of Biram. A second look reveals, however, the extent to which Essa confronts her mother's memory (and historical narrative) rather than representing it. In the opening scene of the film, Essa's conversation with her is heard in voice over against an archive image of a mother holding a dead child. As the camera pans slowly over the image Essa is heard saying

“come on mum, tell me the story of Biram”. The mother starts telling and Essa soon interrupts “be precise mother, tell me the smallest details”. “I was a little child”, replies the mother, “what could I possibly remember”. This is an important proclamation, especially if one considers it against the array of detailed testimonies in *Keys, 1948* and *Legend*. The film continues in the same vein – Essa on the one hand gives voice to her mother’s memories and on the other hand undermines them, throwing their reliability into question. Essa’s persistent interrogations require specific dates and places in which family events took place, and the mother’s evasive, confused and sometime contradictory answers fail to provide them. Visually the film moves between the ruins of Biram, the current family home in the nearby village of Jish, and archive footage of the war. While in the films I discussed previously the visual archives were used as visible evidence that supported the testimonies of the elders, here Essa appears to be using the archives *against* the unreliability of her mother’s story, as if to prove to her that there is an alternative historical narrative. Similarly, Essa probes her mother to explain both the reasons for not resisting the Israeli soldiers during the war itself, and about her dead father’s collaboration with the Israeli regime, working for the Israeli police. The mother answers. As in the previous films she talks about fear and the need to survive, but while in the previous films criticism was suggested subtly if at all, here Essa expresses explicit distress at her mother’s reply.

The confrontation between Essa and her mother reveals the conflict between the generations over different perceptions of history, politics and identity. While the mother keeps the memory of Biram alive – perpetually fixed as an image of the past in the present, for Essa, Biram belongs to the past but is used as a symbol of political struggle. “... I fight for it, but clinging to it is like clinging to an illusion”, she says to her mother. “I’m not like you”, replies the mother, “I still have hope that we will return... no matter how long it takes we’ll return... even if I’m dead we shall return. Do we not return when we are dead? Either on my legs or on someone’s shoulders”.

While the mother shows a perception of time that seems circular, as if it belongs to a peasant pre-modern setting (similar to the time that was depicted in the films of Ali

Nassar), Essa pushes towards a progress-led modern perception of time and history. Different discourses of nationality are also revealed as Essa urges her mother, at several points in the film, to address the issue directly. The following dialogue illustrates that.

Mother: I am not considered as a Palestinian. I live in Israel.

Essa: you are Palestinian, living in the land of Palestine that became Israel.

Mother : (silence)

Essa: no?

Mother: yes. I was born in the village of Biram, so yes, I am Palestinian. In my birth certificate it says Palestinian....I wasn't born in the era of Israel I was born in the time of Palestine.

Essa: So you are Palestinian.

Mother: no, on my ID card it doesn't say Palestinian

Essa: According to your ID card you're Israeli but actually you're Palestinian

Mother: I was born in Palestine.

Essa: (impatiently) so are you Palestinian or Israeli?

Mother: Israeli.



Essa and her mother in the kitchen at the final scene of *Ashes (Ramad)*, Rima Essa, 2001)

Throughout the film, during the intimate yet tense conversations with her mother, Essa oscillates between positioning herself on the side of her mother, supporting and identifying with her, and confronting her, at times subtly and at times overtly

undermining her. In the final scene, as the two sit in the small and darkly lit kitchen, the mother defeated by the arguments of the daughter, puts her head down. Essa tells her “never mind, mother I will bring back what you lost”. Thus, by probing her mother to break out of the melancholia and the stasis that it perpetuates, Essa marks a movement towards action. Her telling of the traumatic events of the past leads her towards a position from which to speak in the present. This is also revealed in the scenes in which Essa is shown guiding tours for Palestinian youths in the ruins of Biram. These young children utter with confidence and persuasiveness what Essa’s mother cannot say.

Paradise Lost sketches Mara’ana’s ‘search for a position from which to speak’. She moves visually and thematically in between spaces, timeframes and discourses, in an attempt to find a place of belonging. The film opens with an intimate scene where we see Mara’ana and her mother playfully dressing each other up in the traditional headscarf (*Hijab*), laughing and joking at the somewhat strange image of them in religious outfits. We soon learn from their conversation that the mother is about to go on a *Hajj* (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca), and on her return, observing the religion, will wear the *Hijab* permanently. Mara’ana teases her and mocks her about it, and as the image changes from the intimate scene in the bedroom to a wide shot of Mara’ana’s home village Fureidis, Mara’ana’s voice tells us: “mom and I still joke around but we’ve become more distant, like the distance between me and my village”.

Feeling that there is a growing distance between her and her mother, and in parallel between her and her village, Mara’ana sets off on a journey to discover the history of the village and to find her own points of affiliation. First, she attempts to challenge the silence that surrounds the history of the village. Fureidis, as we learn early in the film, is one of the few Arab villages that remained on Israel’s coastal plain after the 1948 war, while the neighbouring villages, like Tantura, in which a massacre took place were destroyed. “I have always wondered” says Mara’ana in the narration of the film “why only Fureidis was left intact”. Yet, despite the film’s opening question, the film tells us very little about the actual history of Fureidis. Instead, what is revealed to us in its course is the prevalence of a political culture of fear, as Mara’ana faces evasive

responses to her probing questions time and again. As in *Ashes*, the topic of the film is not the historical narrative as much as the silencing of that narrative.

To discuss the history Mara'ana turns to her father. She remembered rumours from her childhood that as a teenager during the war he was sent to help dig mass graves in the neighbouring village Tantura. Yet, her father, who like Essa's mother represents the generation of the *survivors*, refuses to acknowledge anything and constantly warns her against getting involved with issues like that. "This is politics", he tells her as she asks him about his experiences in the 1948 war, "I don't want you to get into trouble". In one poignant scene, standing by his beloved fig tree, he explains to her why she must keep silent. Echoing Essa's mother's perception of the history he says "this is not our time, my daughter".

As Mara'ana's conflict with her mother over religion and tradition intensifies, and as the frustration with her father's silence grows, she turns to another childhood memory. She remembers a role model of political activism from the village, a girl named Suad. Suad was the only one in the village who openly took part in political resistance in the 1980s, supporting the PLO at a time when it was still considered illegal by the Israeli government. After the Israeli authorities arrested Suad and her support of the PLO became known she was outcast by the village and subsequently left to live in London. "Suad's story raised questions of identity and affiliation for me", Mara'ana says in the narration of the film, "which I didn't know how to explore at the time". Following this memory, Mara'ana starts to investigate about Suad. While the political atmosphere has changed considerably since the 1980s, and support of the PLO is no longer illegal, when Mara'ana attempts to probe the people of the village to tell her about Suad she is faced with the same wall of silence. Determined to break through the silence, Mara'ana travels to meet Suad in London and convinces her to come back to the village for a visit. The village remains steadfastly silent and hostile towards Suad. However, a meaningful dialogue unfolds between Suad and Mara'ana. While Mara'ana resists the silence of her father, she finds it equally difficult to align with Suad's model of activism. As she explained to me in an interview: "my father's generation is the silent one, Suad's is the

militant one and my generation wants to know; we are not sure what to do with it yet, but we want to find the way ourselves”.¹⁶³

An additional axis of the film is Mara’ana’s relationship with Israel, particularly with the affluent neighbouring Jewish town Zichron Yakov, where her mother worked as a nanny, and with her friends in Tel Aviv. As a child, Mara’ana resented the socio-economic gap between her and the Jewish children her mother used to mind.¹⁶⁴ Today, Tel Aviv represents for Mara’ana the option to “be a free woman”, away from the village’s cultural values and social institutions. Tel Aviv is marked as the space of Western culture, where Mara’ana hopes she can find “consent relations” or “contractual affiliations”, to use Naficy’s terms again. Visually, Tel Aviv is represented in the film mainly by the image of shopping in Shenkin street, which has an iconic image of liberalism, renowned for its young and vibrant atmosphere, cafes, bars and boutiques, and its associations with leftist politics.

In choosing Shenkin street for the location shot of Tel-Aviv, Mara’ana is not unique. Many Israeli and Western films have used it as the location symbolising the free secular and Western spirit of the city. Images of a stroll along Shenkin Street on a Friday afternoon, when the street is swamped with buzzing youth has dominated much of the visual representation of the city in Israeli cinema and media and across the world. However, it is important to note that what is often strikingly absent from those iconic images of liberal Tel-Aviv – Mara’ana’s included – is the relatively large concentration of orthodox Jews living in and around Shenkin street. Similarly, Shenkin street is often represented in isolation, detached from its geographical location in the city. Being geographically at the ‘heart’ of Tel-Aviv, the street marks the border between the affluent north and the poorer south of the city. Historically, Tel-Aviv developed spatially through a gradual expansion from Jaffa to the north. In contemporary Tel Aviv the

¹⁶³ Ibtisam Mara’ana, interview, Rishpon, 26.7.2005.

¹⁶⁴ One of the popular stories about Furadis and why it was not harmed during the 1948 war is that the Israeli government ordered to keep it intact so that the influx of Arab labour into the affluent Zichron Yaakov will remain. This story is also mentioned by one of the characters in Bakri’s *1948*. In general, Furadis has a reputation of collaborator’s village.

further one goes north the further one gets away from the Palestinian population and signs of 'Arabness'.

Thus, in the imaginary landscape of Tel Aviv that is evoked in *Paradise Lost* (as in Mara'ana's later films) religion – Jewish or Islamic – does not exist and neither does the Palestinian population of the Tel-Aviv- Jaffa municipality. Again, Mara'ana is not alone. The invisibility of anything associated with the Middle East, or with religion, is at the heart Tel-Aviv's self-perception. When examining the representation of Tel-Aviv in Israeli films of the 1990s, Yael Ben Zvi has noted that Tel Aviv is constructed – contradictorily – as the centre of Israeli society and as an isolated space. Tel Aviv is represented as a centre without any visible periphery. According to Ben Zvi, Tel Aviv is constructed first and foremost as a postmodern concept, image and lifestyle, which is “disconnected from Israel, does not exist in the geographical space of Israel and in fact has nothing to do with Israel” (2002). The majority of the population of Israel -religious people, newcomers, Palestinians and so on, are “structurally absent” from the films. (ibid).¹⁶⁵

In one poignant scene Mara'ana sits with her friends in a Tel-Avivian flat. As they are having coffee and Arab cookies together one of them jokingly says: “Honey, you should move to Tel Aviv, so that we can come eat Arab cookies with you every day, so we will not have to drive all the way there”. As they all break into laughter he continues “and if you are so attached to the mass grave in Tantura, don't worry, they killed Arabs here too, and took away their homes. No one gives a shit about them here either. You'll feel right at home”. “Then why should I come here”? asks Mara'ana and another friend answers, as the camera zooms in on him “Fureidis is where you come from, but it is not right for you anymore. Because no one understands you there... the people there are in a different frame of mind”. Mara'ana explains to him in reply “what frustrates me about Fureidis is their lack of cooperation. They don't share anything with us, the young generation, about the history. I think that knowing the history enables us to live in the

¹⁶⁵ Similar depiction of Tel Aviv as the epitome of modernity which offers freedom from the constraints of patriarchy is seen in Mara'ana's later film *Three Times Divorced*, albeit for a brief moment.

present and the future...". Mara'ana was severely criticized for this particular scene. For her fellow Palestinian filmmakers and critics it signified the Israeli sense of superiority over the Arab culture and Mara'ana's giving in to it. In interview with me Mara'ana said "I included the scene because it happened, and because it is true to my life. It has black humor, of course, but they are my friends, and I did talk to them about these issues".¹⁶⁶

Thus, Mara'ana combines the different dimensions of national, cultural and gender identities and negotiates the conflicting discourses of nationality, modernity and tradition at the same time. In the penultimate scene Mara'ana and Suad sit on the shore by the destroyed village of Tantura.



Mara'ana and Suad on the seashore of the destroyed village Tantura in *Paradise Lost*

"I decided to take Suad to Tantura, the village that is no more; this is where my father's silence began and this is what made me want to talk..." says Mara'ana in the narration. It is in this scene that Mara'ana asserts a subject position that is different to that of Suad, and the generational conflict is outlined. "We are the 'forbidden' kids, we were born in the time of the 'forbidden'" Suad says to her finally, "... but you are from the world of opportunities...".

¹⁶⁶ Ibtisam Mara'ana, interview, Rishpon, 26.7.2005.

The film ends as beautifully constructed images of the Tantura shoreline and the sea in sunset dissolve into an image of Mara'ana standing on the platform waiting to board a train to Tel-Aviv. In voice over she says: "I used to want to be like Suad. But today I believe I can only be me. I always wanted to know the history, but today I don't want to keep looking back. Chained to the past has no way out. I want to look forward, to a future where I will be a free woman". The end of the film is thus the beginning of Mara'ana's journey into what seems to be a quest for women's liberation. In all her following films she focused on gender and I discuss them in detail in chapter six.

Aesthetically, the film exemplifies the spatial focus on the 'here and now'. While Mara'ana's concern about history is expressed in her narration and conversations with friends and relatives, contemporary and realist images govern the film. I will address that aspect film in the following chapter. Fureidis is revealed to us in its every day routine: the children going to school, the coffee shop where the men gather, the fisherman at work. We see Mara'ana's family gathered in the yard baking cookies in the stone oven and her father as he takes care of his favorite fig tree. Fureidis was not destroyed and life did go on, even under the Israeli rule. The landscape surrounding Fureidis, especially the coast, is treated with a romantic aesthetic - beautiful images of the sea at sunset are repeated in the film. Visually then, there is little evidence of the *Nakba* in the film. Even when Mara'ana goes down to the ruins of Tantura, the village that was destroyed, the camera privileges warm images of the sea, the rocks and the sunset. This aesthetic treatment stands in sharp contrast to the films of Bakri, Hassan and Dau that I discussed earlier before.

Paradise Lost, Ibtisam Mara'ana's debut film, was funded by the New Israeli Foundation for Cinema and TV and was warmly received in Israel, but has not been successful elsewhere. As with other examples of films I discuss here the distribution of the film suffered from the tendency to read films from Israel/Palestine within the national paradigm exclusively. According to Mara'ana:

Outside of Israel the film was not understood. It was screened in a number of festivals in Europe and the US but audiences did not get it. They did not get who I am, Israeli or Palestinian. They want things to be clear-cut, it's hard for them to understand this identity conflict. When it was screened in France I was sure it was going to be celebrated but it was taken to be pro-Israeli. The middle ground is problematic for people...In Israel the film was well received because people live this middle ground. I know it is being taught across the country in the context of multi-culturalism, as an example of a film that is a protest film but does it gently... Across the green line the film makes people angry. They also don't understand it, they look at the end of the film and see it as a message of giving up [on the struggle].¹⁶⁷

Private Investigation (2002) is about the process of identity construction and coming into a political consciousness. Like *Paradise Lost* and *Ashes* the film seeks not only to break the silence of the older generation but to challenge it, and with it to challenge the conformity and acceptance of an Israeli-Arab identity within the Palestinian community in Israel. The filmmaker, Ula Tabari, travels from her self-imposed exile in Paris back to her hometown Nazareth, following a glimpse of a memory, a photo of her as a child, during the Israeli independence day celebrations in her Arab school in Israel, dressed in "blue and white" (the colours of the Israeli flag) and waving the Israeli flag. Her private investigation sets out to understand why she seems so willingly cooperative in this photo and whether things are the same today. Using the celebration of the Israeli Independence Day as an emblem of the politics of identity of Palestinians in Israel, Tabari like Mara'ana in *Paradise Lost*, moves around her hometown interrogating her own family members, teachers, friends, and fellow Nazareth residents as to whether they celebrate the Israeli Independence Day or commemorate the *Nakba*, directly questioning their subject positions and affiliations.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Ibtisam Mara'ana, interview, Rishpon, 26.7.2005.

¹⁶⁸ Nizar Hassan's film *Istiklal* (independence), which was the first to tackle the issue, also used the celebration of the Israeli Independence Day as a narrative device through which to explore Israeli-Arab identity.



Tabari's childhood photo celebrating Israel's Independence Day, in *Private Investigation*.

Tabari herself comes from a politically conscious family. As her mother tells her early in the film, “we never set foot out of the house (on Independence Day). Your father writes poetry. A friend asked him what did you write for Independence Day and your father said ‘nothing...drape the land in Black. This is the enemy’s celebration. If you are a free man, shut yourself away, this is a day of mourning’. This has always been our motto and always will be”. People used to celebrate, going on a day out for a trip or a picnic, she explains to her daughter because we were living under a military regime, and people could not travel without a permit. “Nobody was happy on Independence Day”, she says but on that day travel was free, so people did. Today, Tabari’s older sister tells her later in the film, most Palestinians in Israel don’t know the history:

The fact is that we [the Palestinian community in Israel] are not able to acknowledge our inner struggle [about identity]... if you make a survey about how many of us don’t know [the history], that we don’t know ourselves, you will find a very large number. When you ask them about this they stutter not because of the camera or fear or confusion but because they simply don’t know...maybe in our house these things had less of an impact. Not because our father raised us on nationalistic values but because he did not raise us on this country’s opportunistic values. We knew we weren’t Israelis, or Jews, but we didn’t know who we were. We only have questions.

Beyond her conversations with her family, Tabari examines the more institutional mechanisms of Israeli indoctrination. As her sister suggests, while the military regime is long gone, her random questioning in the streets of Nazareth, as well as her conversations with her peers and former teachers, reveal the level to which the Israeli discourse has been internalised. Tabari's conversation with her former teacher exemplifies this and resonates in many ways with Essa's conversation with her mother quoted above:

Teacher: "you were educated to obey instructions...you took part in the celebrations lovingly and willingly because that's what the teacher said and that's what the principal wanted".

Tabari: "what do you think of our children's identity today"? "what am I supposed to tell my kids"?

Teacher: "(you say) I am an Arab living in a state called Israel. This is the reality. I can't and don't want to change it. An "Israeli-Arab" means: an Arab living in Israel. So I believe that both terms are correct".

Tabari: "I define myself as a Palestinian"

Teacher: "it's matter of outlook. It's true that this state was built over another state. but in today's reality we are Arab-Israelis "

Tabari: "Not even Palestinian-Israelis"?

Teacher: "No. (after a long pause) No."

The scene ends as the teacher sings to the visibly distressed Tabari one of the Independence Day songs that were composed for the Arab schools. The lyrics (exhibiting much more of a patriotic zeal than the equivalent songs in Hebrew which were part of Jewish children's curriculum) say: "on our Independence Day our joy increases, the weather purifies, the light shines and we are proud of our deeds. The universe sings for you Israel, repeats your melodies through the generations. Rejoice on your jubilee, the date of receiving the holy message...". What Tabari evokes here in a documentary mode, through the interview and the photos, Elia Suleiman comically dramatized in his recent film *The Time That Remains* (2009). In one of the key scenes of his film, the schoolboy Suleiman is seen participating in an Independence Day

celebration in school, where the children sing in Hebrew and Arabic songs of praise to Israel in front of the school staff and a group of supervisors from the Ministry.

Yet, this is not all that Tabari's investigation yields. Alongside the internalised Israeli discourse the film reveals resistance to it. Several of the protagonists talk about their political mobilization, about processes of identity construction, in which they first came to realise the Palestinian historical narrative and then attempted to articulate their identity and politics within the contemporary realities of the Israeli state. These include, for example, Tabari's sister and her husband who formed an alternative school within the current Arab school system, or a head of a human rights association, or a school friend who talks about their moment of transformation during their university education. Another example is Tabari's mother, who tells how conversations with Jewish peers during her studies to become a teacher mobilized her into political action. "It is both funny and sad at the same time" she says "that you could talk about certain things more freely among Jews than among Arabs". Nowadays, Tabari's mother is involved in constructing an alternative history curriculum and often goes to nurseries and schools around the time of Independence Day to teach children about the *Nakba*. In one scene in the film she is seen telling nursery children of her personal experiences as a child, when her home village Tarshiha was bombed by Israeli airplanes in 1948.¹⁶⁹ In articulating resistance the film focuses, like many other Palestinian films, on children. Tabari's camera privileges the children and she conducts several interviews with children about their national identity. Like in *Ashes* the children of today recount the story of the *Nakba* without difficulty. Mastering Arabic and Hebrew with equal skill some of them proclaim their Palestinian identity with little inhibition. Tabrai ends the film back in Paris, away from her home in Nazareth, but her focus on the confident proclamation of the children outlines a look to the future.

Visually the film resembles *Paradise Lost*. It is set in Nazareth 'here and now'. Just as much as Tabari's investigation is private, the film does not lead us to read the imagery

¹⁶⁹ This resembles the curriculum of the Holocaust in Israeli schools, which, since the 1980s tends to include survivors who come to tell their personal story to the school children.

of Nazareth as symbols of a wider or different space. The camera often captures the streets of the town in wide or tracking shots, primarily in a realist mode, which provides us with a sense of the place and its locality. Tabari's family home, as well as her sister's, are seen in their everyday functionality as places that are inhabited and lived in rather than deserted or destroyed – gardens with fruit, cooking, a roof terrace where a family sits at night to smoke a Nargila and sing. This is Nazareth as Tabari lives it, no less and no more. Keeping her story focused on the locality of her life experiences, rather than constructing a space of a unified Palestine, is what guides Tabari's work. As she explained to me in interview: "I think Palestinians in Jerusalem should talk about their situation, those in Gaza should talk about Gaza and I should talk about mine".¹⁷⁰

Similar to *Paradise Lost*, the production history of *Private Investigation* mirrored the questions of identity that the film tackles. Working from Paris, Tabari initially took the film to a Lebanese-French producer who raised some funds from various European funds. "It was a very rocky production from the start", Tabari says. After she fell out with her producer half way through the production, she turned to the Israeli producer Eyal Sivan, whose French production company completed and distributed the film. While Tabari eventually managed to complete the film, raising funds and securing distribution proved to be difficult. According to Tabari (and Sivan) it was difficult to deal with the European funders because there was a constant feeling that they didn't understand what the film was about. For example, tells Tabari:

When I went to see one of the commissioning editors in Arte in Paris, I showed him the rough cut and was shocked by his reaction. He said that regardless of the quality of the film he can't take it. He told me 'there are Israelis and there are Palestinians, but an Israeli-Palestinian, what is that? It doesn't exist'. Well, I said in reply, allow me to light a cigarette please, so you can tell your children that a woman that doesn't exist once smoked a cigarette in your office... ZDF had a more welcoming approach and they did give me some funding for development. But we worked for 8 months together and I still encountered similar problems of misunderstanding. The meetings were always very emotional as a result....we would have meetings and I would show the commissioning editor the rushes and she would say 'but we have to have an Israeli side' and I would

¹⁷⁰ Ula Tabari, interview, Paris 26.2.2006.

say 'I am the Israeli side' so she would say 'we then have to have a Palestinian side' and I would say 'I am also the Palestinian side'... it was too hard for them to grasp. In the end they sent me a list of questions that I needed to answer so they would get a sense of my politics. It wasn't clear to them from the film. The list included questions like 'what is your position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict', I think it is pretty clear from the film, no?'.¹⁷¹

Other examples, which I do not discuss in detail, include films like *Tur'an* (2003), Safa Adawi's documentary about her home village Tu'ran in the Galilee. The film was made with a group of high school students in the village, and based on a history book that was written by the high school's head teacher. While the production values of the film leave a lot to be desired, and the film has not moved much beyond the educational circuit, its narrative reveals similar trends to those discussed above, particularly in relation to the open confrontation with the older generation. The film includes a scene in which the school students re-enact the flight of the older generation from the village during the war, and portrays them in a critical light.¹⁷² Basel Tannous's *Arus el-Jalil* (2006) deals with the history of the director's village of Tarshiha, and of the *Nakba*, through the story of Fatmeh Hawari. When the war of 1948 started Fatmeh, aged 18, was the beauty of the village and was about to be married. An Israeli bomb hit her house, killed her family and left her paralyzed and alone. Almost 50 years later, the pilot who dropped the bomb on her house, the famous Israeli peace activist Abie Nathan, came looking for her, seeking forgiveness. Fatmeh sent him away. Tannous's film, made 10 years after Nathan's visit, follows Fatmeh as she pays a visit to Nathan, who is now on his death bed. The meeting between the two, and Fatmeh's reflections, elicit questions of memory and reconciliation.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Tu'ran is a 50-minute documentary which was largely self-funded by Adawi. Kit and editing facilities were provided by the NGO I'lam.

¹⁷³ The film emerged out of the initiative of the New Foundation for Cinema and Television and the Second Broadcast Authority in Nazareth. See p. 65.



The unfinished roof of Aljafari's home in Ramle in *The Roof*

Kamal Aljafari's *The Roof* (*Al Sateh*, 2006), which I also discuss in the next chapter, is similarly a personal negotiation with the past, from a vantage point in the present. In this poetic documentary the director reflects on his family in contemporary Ramle, and in their original home town of Jaffa. The unfinished roof on the top of the family home in Ramle serves as a metaphor through which Aljafari investigates Palestinian life in Israel.

The film starts in the present, with a random conversation with the director and his sister, but moves quickly to tell the history of the family. Over images of the sea in Jaffa and the cemetery in Ramle we hear the director's voice:

It all started in 1948, in May. My grandparents were on a boat on their way to Beirut, after their city Jaffa had been bombed. Over those few days the waves were too big so they were forced to return... but when they came back, Palestine was already gone. Their homes were gone as well... the people that remained were forced to live in one neighbourhood, and they were given the houses of other Palestinians, this was the case of my mother's family in Jaffa, and this was the case of my father's family in Ramle, where I was born. In 1948 the owners of this house were still building the second floor. Today the house is still the same: my parents live on the first floor and the past lives above them.

The film goes on to deal largely with the present, depicting Ramle and Jaffa as cities marked by decay and absence as I will discuss in the next chapter. However, two points are relevant to the argument in this chapter. Aljafari, like the other filmmakers I discuss here, is concerned with the old generation's strategies of coping, and with questions of leaving or remaining in one's home. In one short scene his uncle talks about the fact that the family wanted to leave but couldn't because of the rough sea. In another short scene, his uncle talks to the grandmother about the war, as the conversation revolves around the reasons to stay. Generally speaking, Aljafari's presence in the film, on and off camera, is largely subtle and often quiet. Unlike Tabari, Mara'ana and Essa we hardly hear him asking questions. Yet, in this scene, Aljafari interrupts and asks, behind the camera, "grandmother, why did you want to leave in 1948?"

In the final scene of the film, the director and his mother are seen sitting in their living room in Ramle. After a long silence the mother asks: "do you want to finish the house?". "I don't know – I find it strange to finish something that does not belong to us" and the mother replies "but they have all left". When I asked the director about this scene in a conversation in London, he said:

The way I work normally is through a dialectical process between the camera and how I want to film things, and what happens in reality. I often dictate the pace of things by the camera or editing, but by and large I did not ask them (the protagonists) to pose for me, I gave them general instructions on what I want to talk about...the final scene was the only time in the film that I told my mum what to say. I asked her to ask me this question.¹⁷⁴

Thus, if the film started with the metaphor of the unfinished roof as "the past", the suggestion to finish it off in the final scene, purposefully probed by the director, can be seen as a move forward, which breaks with the perpetual imposition of the past up on the present.

¹⁷⁴ The conversation was held in a Q&A after the screening of *The Roof* in the London Palestinian Film Festival, 8 May 2010.

Scandar Copti and Rabi'a Bukari's *The Truth* (*Al Haqiqa*, 2002) is a short experimental film engaging satirically with meta-questions about the status of memory itself, of historical truth and of storytelling, specifically in relation to the history of the filmmakers' hometown Jaffa. This film is constructed around conversations between Bukari and Copti. They tour the city's different sites; these are far from being the conventional sites associated with the Orientalist image of the city - such as the old tower clock or the flea market - Bukari and Copti take us to an abandoned building site, a cemetery or the refuse tip, the places where residents of the city sometimes hang out. There, they tell the camera fabricated stories about the history of these places, which are dotted with references to imagined Zionist conspiracies. For example, in the cemetery Bukari explains to the camera: "all this is made by the Jews, the Jews I mean the Zionists...this is not a natural thing, it was made to show us that when a man dies you put him in a grave. Why should we put him in a grave? They confused us so we'll think that our people are dead because there are graves. Really, it's true, it makes sense".

In between the scenes that take place in those sites, Bukari and Copti are sitting on the door step, drinking coffee and philosophising about truth. Importantly, while dealing with the issue of historical truth, *The Truth*, like the *Paradise Lost* and *Private Investigation*, is set in the 'here and now'. Here, we do not see life in Jaffa, but it is marked by the film's music score. Written by Bukari the score consists of original electronic music, which accompanies the two throughout the film. The film's opening scene sees Bukari and Copti in Bukari's recording studio, and thus marks the starting point in the present from which the filmmakers embark on their negotiation with history.

Ultimately, as in the other films, *The Truth* comments, satirically, on the ignorance of their history that exists amongst Palestinians in Israel. Its meta-questioning of the status of historical truth ventures out from cultural hybridity and multiple points of view. As Laura Marks (1994) has argued about the politics of hybrid cinema, the violent spatiotemporal disjunctions that characterize the physical effects of exile, immigration

and displacement, also cause a rupture in the notions of truth, which allows putting different regimes of truth one against the other.

A similar video art project of Copti's was 'The Bus Tour', which took tourists on a tour of Jaffa's alternative history. In the bus, a video by Copti was presented, in which Copti was guiding a puppet made of rags called Sun through the town, telling about the history of landmarks and buildings. As in *The Truth* the stories were improvised and were fabricated, and bore only a loose connection to actual historical events in the city. Yet, as Copti said in an interview with Monetrescu (2009), Jewish participants in the tour, who were not familiar with the Palestinian history of Jaffa, have often taken the fabricated stories as truth.

In both works, Copti uses national mythologies, both Zionist and Palestinian, and throws them playfully into confusion and irony. In the urban setting of Jaffa, where he grew up, he mocks Israeli-Jewish Orientalist tropes, which are the source of romanticised enchantment with Jaffa (such as "the good Arab coffee" or the "market"), as well as Palestinian national metaphors such as the olive tree and working the land. Cynically, Copti destabilises these metaphors, for example in one scene in the Bus Tour, where Copti teaches his puppet Sun, in a mannerism that recalls traditional storytelling, to make sure he uses cement to fertilise the land and nourish the olive trees. The metaphor of cement, references not only decayed Jaffa, which I will address in more detail in the next chapter, but the building labour many Palestinian citizens resorted to under Israel's modernisation processes. In mixing the metaphors of olive/cement, as Monterescu (2009) remarks, Copti "respectively structures the Palestinian and Israeli discourses of rootedness and modernisation" (669).

It is perhaps interesting to note that all the films of the younger generation I discuss here were debut films. While they were produced in different contexts – some within Israel, some while the filmmakers resided abroad, some were funded by European or American funds, and others by Israeli film funds – in all cases the emergence of the filmmakers into a cinematic career and their 'search for identity' is intertwined. In this

sense, these films are a primary example of what Hall defined as the process of 'finding a position from which to speak'. In my interviews with the filmmakers, many talked specifically about the process of making the film as an important factor, first in coming to realise the history and then as a means of articulating their identity. The filmmakers' political strategy regarding their identity informed their subsequent work.

For example, Ula Tabari explained:

Some people are haunted by the history...there is this huge nostalgia that takes over everything. My brother for example is stuck with this tale of the glorious family that we had and that he never knew. He is living with this huge hope that one day he will find this glorious family again.... I remember a meeting with Nizar Hassan when he told me 'you should make a film about the history of your family you come from an amazing family' but I am not interested in making such films....the issue of identity is more complex. I am the daughter of this place, I don't want to deny it...[but] in order to be free in your mind, the way to deal with the Israeli element is to ignore it. I know the Israeli culture and language very well but one of the strategies for me was to boycott Hebrew...it became the language of my oppressor to me at some point.

In Tel Aviv, where I first started to say to people 'I am Palestinian', people used to call me Hamas follower, but it was ok, it was almost like a game because it was provocative enough to start a conversation. Here [in Paris] when I am asked where are you from I automatically say 'I'm Palestinian'. Only if I am asked where am I from again I say 'Nazareth, which is now in Israel'...in short, in order to say who you are you have to make a speech, but slowly you learn how to tackle the issue, how to respond...I do say I am Israeli too sometimes, depends on the context. It's a strategy. I now also speak Hebrew sometimes but it depends with whom. I also got back to reading in Hebrew recently I don't want to forget it.¹⁷⁵

Tabari at the end of *Private Investigation* went back to Paris, where she still resides. Her subsequent films were not only about the Palestinian experience but, informed by her political strategy, are easily placed within the contours of Palestinian cinema, by critics and audiences alike.

¹⁷⁵ Ula Tabari, interview, 26.2.2006, Paris.

In contrast, although dealing with the same dilemma, Mara'ana's strategy and politics of identity led her elsewhere. In interview with me in 2004 Mara'ana said: "making *Paradise Lost* was a way of dealing with the history for me. But when I am asked if I feel Israeli or Palestinian I get confused time and again. If I was forced to answer I would say that I cannot ignore the fact that am also Israeli". In an interview for the online edition of the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* in 2008 Mara'ana said:

The issue of belonging and identity has been part of my quest for many years, as it is for many members of my confused generation, but I reached the conclusion that there is no real substance in all this dressing-up of Israeli-Arabs as Palestinians....I think this identity has crumbled for me....I can feel Israeli, which I do, but this does not mean that it is a state of all its citizens. My dream is to turn this place to a multicultural society.¹⁷⁶

Mara'ana's later films indeed moved away from overt engagement with national identity or with history. While in *Paradise Lost* her autobiographical 'search for identity' intertwined her questioning of 'traditional' gender roles with her search for a national subject position, Mara'ana's subsequent documentaries *Badal* (2005), *Al Jiser* (2005), *Three Times Divorced* (2007) and *Lady Kul Al Arab* (2008) are dedicated to gender. As she explained:

I don't think I am going to continue dealing with the political (national) issue in my films. I feel I have exhausted it in *Paradise Lost*. When I made *Badal* it was already clear that the film is not political, however naïve it may sound ... these days I have my own outlook on things, and I have things to say about my society and the social codes and everything to do with women.¹⁷⁷

Yet, I suggest that while the films are about other women, Mara'ana's entire film work can be read as a continuous project of 'inscribing the self'. If in *Paradise Lost* Mara'ana dealt directly with the conflicts that arose from her ambition to become a filmmaker in the face of expectations that she would get married and conform to dominant models of patriarchy, she continues to do this in different ways in her later films. Through making

¹⁷⁶ Stern, Itai. (25.7.2008). *Ma'ariv*.

¹⁷⁷ Ibtisam Mara'ana, interview, Rishpon, 26.7.2005.

the films about other women, she seems to answer back to her mother's cry at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*: "Stop filming, start peeling the potatoes". Choosing the camera over "peeling potatoes", the films act as 'sites' in which her choices are positioned *vis-a-vis* the experiences of her protagonists.

Conclusion

The films I discussed in this chapter have dealt with the Palestinian historical narrative, and specifically the *Nakba*, in different ways. Yet, they have all emphasised the particular experience of Palestinians in Israel and engaged specifically with the lingering effect of a political culture of fear and silence. Largely made and exhibited within Israel, they were not only adding to the corpus of Palestinian cinema, but were instances of intervention within the Israeli public sphere.

While the films of Bakri, Dau, Nassar and Hassan assert national identity through the act of 'remembering' and recounting the history of the *Nakba*, working against its erasure by the Zionist narrative, in the films of the younger filmmakers national identity and historical narratives are under question. The young Palestinian filmmakers are moving beyond an attempt to reconstruct the historical (or mythical) Palestinian village, or to represent the events of the *Nakba*. While some address the past, including the events of the *Nakba*, what unfolds in the films is the very act of searching, digging and constructing the memory as it is experienced by the young filmmaker in the present. This is, I would suggest, a *negotiation* with the past rather than a *representation* of it.

Melancholia, which scholars like Bresheeth identify in earlier films, does not appear in the films of the younger generation. Instead, if the films of 'second generation' filmmakers were subtly addressing the a political culture of fear these films are charged with agency and action. They are more outspoken and literal. If the older filmmakers avoided spelling out criticism of the older generation, and in subtle ways referenced the notion of the *Sumud*, the young filmmakers point the camera at their parents and

grandparents asking them not only to tell about, but also to *account for*, their coping strategies during the *Nakba* and thereafter. Importantly, while all films enfold the private into the public, the films of the younger filmmakers tend to be more subjective and autobiographical.

Spatially, the films of the younger directors are not only set in sites of historic Palestine, either in the bare landscape that marks the distraction or in the reconstructed pre-1948 Palestinian villages, but also in the 'here and now', in Palestinian spaces *within* contemporary Israel. In focusing on the 'here and now' the films oscillate between the past and the present and between spaces, and linger on the process of becoming rather than of being.

Chapter 5

Marginality, Liminality and the Arab town in Israel

If one of the main concerns of Palestinian cinema, as a project of counter-representation, is the construction of a Palestinian historical narrative, then another primary concern is that of space. National discourses insist on singular inhabitation of spaces, under one dominant rule of the nation state, and within a positivist paradigm. Yet, as recent critical theory has established, space is far from being only a material matter. As social and cultural constructions, the meanings assigned to spaces, which in turn signify them as 'places', are embedded in particular power structures and connected with processes of identity construction. Furthermore, these meanings are never fixed, but are in a constant flux of production and signification (Liggett, 1995; Rogoff, 2000; Soja, 1996).¹⁷⁸

The Israeli-Palestinian national conflict is, obviously, a conflict about space; Israel/Palestine is ultimately the same material space, whose meanings are contested and whose boundaries and borders are far from being fixed. With the geo-political dynamics of the conflict over the years – such as the occupation of more territories by Israel in 1967, or the establishment of the PA - the boundaries and meanings of the wider space of Israel/Palestine, and of smaller spaces within Israel/Palestine, have shifted and changed. In the contemporary power structure and geo-political situation, Israel, as an occupying force and colonialist project, exercises different levels and forms of control over spaces within Israel/Palestine.

In the face of Israeli control over the space of historic Palestine, and for many years over the representation of that space, Palestinian cinema at large, from a position at the margins, has invested largely in rendering the invisible Palestinian space visible. Several scholars have engaged with the way different relationships to space impinge on

¹⁷⁸ If in the past space was theorized in its material sense, in recent years space and spatiality are becoming an increasingly potent area of study and a prism of interpretation across disciplines. Influenced in many ways by Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974), the meanings of space began to be re-thought, illuminating the interconnectedness of the mental and social dimensions of space with their material geographical dimensions (Liggett, 1995; Rogoff, 2000; Soja, 1996; Khatib, 2006).

Palestinian cinema and the ways in which Palestinian films construct space, subverting and transcending the Israeli occupation. Khatib, has noted that despite the multiple meanings that the space of Palestine holds as “a bearer of history, religion and myth”, many Palestinian films – in fact Arab films in general - “closely focus on imagining Palestine as a lost homeland” (2006: 44). Several scholars have noted that cinematic representations of Palestine as homeland have often romanticized and idealized the landscape, the land and the connection of the Palestinians to the land (Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008; Khatib, 2006; Shohat, 1988). In such idealized representations of the Palestinian space (as in the films *Wedding in the Galilee*, *The Milky Way*, *The Olive Harvest* and others) the Palestinian village was often constructed as a metonym for the whole of pre-1948 Palestine, and the depiction of landscape transcended the geo-political reality of the Israeli occupation by evoking a united space and unity of man with the land (ibid.).¹⁷⁹

In other films, which are set in the present and that have not reconstructed historical Palestine, space is represented differently. For example, the early films of Rashid Mashrawi, set in the refugee camps, depicted closed and entrapped private spaces disconnected from the national space (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008: 103-117; Khatib, 2006: 51-52). As I noted in the introduction, one of the prominent issues in more recent films, set in the PA, is restriction of movement in and through spaces, borders and boundaries. Frequently featuring roadblocks and checkpoints as a primary location, they are often referred to as the ‘roadblock movies’.

According to Gertz and Khleifi (2008), “borders and roadblocks...have made it difficult for Palestinian cinema, during the years of the two Intifadas, to construct a harmonious space on the one hand, and to deconstruct it in order to reflect the heterogeneity of Palestinian society on the other...thus the house appears in ruins, the outside has been obliterated, and the only place left intact is the border, the roadblock, which splits both identity and geography” (153). Discussing the roadblock films of the *Al-Aksa Intifada*,

¹⁷⁹ See for example Gertz and Khleifi’s analysis of *The Milky Way* (2008: 120-121) and *Wedding in the Galilee* (ibid.: 89), or Khatib on *The Olive Harvest* (2006:56).

Dickinson (2010) explored the trope of the road and its meanings in the particular geopolitical condition in Palestine and in relation to Western cultural metaphors of the road and travelling. The Palestinian roadblock movies, according to Dickinson (Ibid.), radically reorganise spatial and political space (142). In comparison with the legacy of the road movie, these films refuse to “reinscribe the car on the open road as a neoliberal personal space” but construct it as a public space in which, and through which, the occupation is challenged in the everyday (ibid: 143).

Inhibition and prohibition of movement in space, and communication across borders and boundaries, were also the focus of many exilic Palestinian films. For example, Naficy (2001) has shown how in films such as *Measures of Distance* and in Elia Suleiman’s *Homage by Association* and *Introduction to the End of an Argument*, these prohibitions are addressed and subverted by constructing what Naficy refers to as “epistolary narratives” (116-120).

Scholars have often used the concepts of Third Space and liminality in their analyses of the construction of space in Palestinian films. If national discourses insist on singular inhabitation of spaces, postmodern postcolonial and feminist critiques draw attention to multi-inhabitation of spaces and put forward a spatial analysis, which brings into play “a dialectical system in which opposing claims can be positioned in a relation to one another which is not conflictual” (Rogoff, 2000:23).

Within this spatial analysis a number of scholars introduced a concept of a Third Space. Homi Bhabha uses the term Third Space to signify the space of liminality and hybridity, which is constituted in processes of cultural translation (both representation and reproduction). Third Space, Bhabha (1990) argues, is not an identity but “a process of identification” and its importance is that it enables other positions to emerge; this third space, according to Bhabha, “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives....” (211).

Edward Soja, whose influential book *Thirdspace* (1996) traced the theoretical development of the concept, defined third space as a “critical strategy of ‘thirling- as-

othering” that opens up ways of thinking about space, and acting politically, in ways that “respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices” (5). This critical strategy, Soja stresses, does not dismisses the original binary entirely but opens up new alternatives by a creative process of restructuring. Thirdspace is then, according to Soja, a creative recombination and extension of Firstspace perspective that focuses on the material aspects of space, and Secondspace perspective that focuses on the “imagined” representations of spatiality (ibid: 5-6).

In relation to Palestinian films, Khatib (2006), relying on Bhabha’s and hooks’s conceptualisation of the space on the margins as a space of resistance, claims that the refugee camp (in Mashrawi’s films) or the Palestinian landscape (in Khleifi’s films) are Third Spaces since they make visible the Palestinian space and mark the margins as a place of choice (53). Several scholars that discuss the concept of Third Space in Palestinian cinema have done so in relation to films that were made by Palestinian citizens of Israel. For example, Gertz and Khleifi (2006) argue that the films of Michel Khleifi constructed third spaces in their emphasis on the heterogeneity of Palestinians (121) and Suleiman’s *Chronicle of a Disappearance* has created a ‘third space’ that exists between languages, identities, nationalities and cultures.¹⁸⁰ Comparing Palestinian and Israeli films, Naaman discussed liminality in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Legend*, and argued that while Israeli films avoided the concrete (and liminal) geography of Israel/Palestine, Palestinian films subvert the geography of borders by mythically transcending it (Naaman, 2001). Bresheeth similarly discussed the concept of liminality in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and showed in detail that liminality is evident both in the film’s generic and aesthetic approach and in its content.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Gertz and Khleifi point to Suleiman’s unique post-modern cinematic language, in *Chronicle* as well as in his other films, which deconstructs reality and then reconstructs it again as “complex poetical intersections fraught with multiple meanings” (2008: 172- 181).

¹⁸¹ As Bresheeth argues: “side by side we find here scenes that can only be termed as documentary, together with docudrama, fiction and scenes, straight out of the Theatre of the Absurd. This veritable hybridity...is but the liminal envelope of the film; its structure, subjects, topics and techniques all deal with, and are expressed through, liminal means” (2002b: 73).

Expanding on this literature, this chapter is concerned with the ways in which the contemporary spaces within Israel have been constructed in recent films of Palestinian citizens of Israel, and how identity positions are formed within, or in between, spaces.

The films I discuss here are mostly recent and are made primarily by young directors. Many of them have not yet received much analytical attention. In order to illustrate a trend I also refer to *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, which was the subject of scholarly study of a number of academic texts (Bresheeth 2002b; Naaman, 2001, 2006a; Gertz and Khleifi, 2006, 2008; Dabashi, 2006). Theoretically, I follow the scholarly use of the concepts of third space and liminality to think through the representation of space in these new films.

Since Israeli colonialism and its control over space within proper Israel is manifested differently than in the West Bank and Gaza, this chapter seeks, in keeping with the topic of this thesis, to focus on the ways in which the films negotiate with Israeli spatial control and the transformation of spaces, under the processes of colonial 'creative destruction' and the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity. As I briefly discussed in the first chapter, at the intersection of nationalism and modernity, especially in Israel proper, the Israeli state invested widely in the de-Arabisation and modernisation of the space. Within this process, practices and discourses of planning, organisation and development of space (similar to notions of professionalism that I discussed in the second chapter) are seen as a sign of Euro-modernity, which distinguishes Israel from the 'stagnated' and undeveloped Middle East, and they are central to the understanding of the contemporary Palestinian space within Israel.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Contrary to some beliefs, says Zvi Efrat, the Zionist Enterprise was not a spontaneous or improvised process which was governed by conditions of emergency situation, but a highly planned and institutionalized project (Efrat, 2005). In fact, Israel has turned into one of the planning laboratories of the modern era (Wiezman and Segal, 2005, 19). Processes of organization, planning and development that were in operation since the first waves of Zionist immigration to Palestine under Ottoman rule and later, British Mandate, could have been implemented in full force when the state was established. As early as few months after the declaration of independence the new government commissioned the architect Arye Sharon to head a committee that would devise a master-plan for the architecture and environmental design of the state of Israel. The Sharon Plan, as it was later known, became in many ways a blueprint to the landscape of Israel (Efrat, 2005).

Today, Arab towns and Arab neighbourhoods in the once-Arab-now-mixed cities – such as Lod, Ramle, Jaffa, Nazareth, Haifa and Jerusalem – have been considerably transformed over the years but are still *visibly* different from Jewish towns and settlements. This difference is often seen in spatial layout and building style as well as a deprivation of infrastructure in urban public spaces. It is often this visible difference, which marks the marginality of these spaces within the Israeli landscape.¹⁸³

Further, inside Israel, where the conflict is not always manifested in military control, it is often around planning, development and organisation of space that cultural and national conflicts arise. Regulations relating to planning and organisation of space are often used by the state and local municipalities as mechanisms of repression, while opposition to those regulations is in many cases a form of resistance to the Israeli control (Yacobi, 2007; Monterescu, 2009).¹⁸⁴

These processes of ‘creative destruction’ are ongoing but also multi-faceted and constantly subject to change. Israel is still expansionist in its aspirations in relation to the territories beyond the 1967 border and there are still processes of constructing more and more spaces within ‘proper’ Israel as ‘Jewish and modern’, complying with Western models. For example, policies of ‘Judaisation of the Galilee’ aiming to mobilise Israeli-Jews into the Galilee, an area with a Palestinian majority. In other places, like in the municipality of Tel-Aviv-Jaffa, these processes are revealed in projects of neo-liberal urban gentrification.

¹⁸³For example, the two primary types of Jewish farming communities were the Kibbutzim (collective communities) and the Moshavim (most of them cooperatives), which were (and still are) visibly different to the Arab villages. These were characterised by European architecture, uniform layout, centralised modes of social and economic organization and implementation of technology and innovation of farming methods. If in Europe the city was the epitome of modernity, standing in opposition to the non-modern, rural village. In the Zionist-Israeli formulation agricultural communities were not carrying the same cultural baggage of ‘tradition’ and ‘rural’ as in the European case. At least in the first few decades of the state those who practiced agriculture were the elite of society. Farms were essentially modern. Rural was the Arab village or any other Arab space. In the Israeli discourse the word ‘village’ is often used to describe Arab villages, whereas other words (like *Moshav*) are used to describe Jewish agricultural ‘places’. For an illuminating discussion of the Arab village in Israeli discourse see: Gil Eyal, 2004.

¹⁸⁴Haim Yacobi shows how the discourse of planning and development has transformed the form of and meaning of the Palestinian town Lydd, into the ‘mixed town’ of Lod, and argues that Palestinian practices of housing and infrastructure supply, that are deemed illegal and random according to the prevailing Israeli discourse of modernity, are actually forms of spatial protest, forming an alternative pattern of social opposition. These acts, he claims are “based on existing communal networks, and despite their randomness they identify the limits of the state’s control over those that contradict its hegemony” (Haim Yacobi, 2007: 135).

Yet, these processes are contested on a discursive, as well as a material, level especially since the 1990s. I have already mentioned a number of such challenges in chapter one (for example, the project 'Autobiography of a City' or the organisation *Zochrot*). In cinema, recent Israeli films (primarily documentaries) challenged the Zionist spatial imagination by rendering the Arabness of the space of Israel visible and drawing links between the Arab Jews and Palestinians.

For example, Gali Gold (2007) showed how recent documentaries by Israeli women (Arab/Palestinian and Jewish) have challenge the Israeli Orientalist discourse by exposing the Arabness of concrete locales across Israel. According to Gold, focusing on concrete localities, on "the materiality of place" as she puts it, stands in opposition to dominant modes of representation of space in recent Israeli features, and challenges the Zionist construction of the Israeli space as utopia in which ethnic purity exists (219-220).

'In between': Liminality and Third spaces

In the films I discuss in this chapter, as in many other Palestinian (and Israeli) films, the narratives sometimes take place on the road or in liminal spaces of borders. Yet, in contrast to the 'roadblock' movies, whose central element is the restriction of movement, in these films the films' subjects move more freely between spaces and across borders, and this movement in-between spaces is intertwined with a search for a place of belonging. If the films that are set in PA, as Gertz and Khleifi (2008) have put it "delineated blocked geography" (172), in these films liminal spaces are often portrayed as spaces of cohabitation.

In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, which was made in the early years of the Oslo agreement inside Israel, Suleiman moves between places across Israel/ Palestine, in an attempt to find a place of belonging. Seen arriving at the beginning of the film from his self-imposed exile in New York to Nazareth, his home town, he later moves to live in Jerusalem only to return to Nazareth and then to New York at the end of the film. While

Nazareth and Jerusalem are the main locations of the film, snippets of other places - the Sea of Galilee, Tel-Aviv and Jericho (in the PA) - are seen during Suleiman's journeys across the country. The private journeys of the director, as Gertz and Khleifi (2008) argue, expose to the viewer to the various vistas and draw a kind of map of Palestine stretching from north to south, and from east to west (171).

Moreover, through his journeys to different places within the space of Israel/Palestine Suleiman assumes different 'positionalities'. In none of these places does Suleiman feel fully 'at home' (Bresheeth, 2002b; Gertz and Khleifi, 2008), occupying instead a position of a silent observer from the outside (a position his screen persona occupies also in his later films *Divine Intervention* and *The Time that Remains*). In Nazareth, where the first part of the film takes place, Suleiman is personal and intimate, operating in a closed world in which the Israeli control does not exist. In Jerusalem, he assumes a political position. There, as Bresheeth (2002b) puts it, in "the locus of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the place where it is kept alive... Suleiman moves precariously and furtively...finding it difficult to act as the person, to act personally as he did in Nazareth" (75), and it is there, in Jerusalem, that the political act of resistance occurs. Yet, the act of political resistance in Jerusalem takes the form of a subversion akin to Bhabha's notions of hybridity, where the language and culture of the colonialist are being used against him as a means of transgression. In one of the film's most poignant scenes a woman called A'dan (played by Ula Tabari), whom Suleiman meets in Jerusalem, reverses the power structure by making use of one of the Israeli Army's walkie talkies (that Suleiman finds left behind by a police officer earlier in the film) to give orders, in Hebrew, in official police code, to the Israeli police units. A'dan reports fictional political riots and orders the units to move to different strategic points across the city. Standing at a vantage point on one of the hills, she watches the chaos emerge as police cars race in different directions. Then, returning to her room in the theatre she orders them to evacuate Jerusalem, before singing softly the Israeli national anthem.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ For a more detailed analysis of other forms of transgression in the film see: Bresheeth, 2002b.



A'dan giving instructions to the Israeli police in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*

In several newer films by younger Palestinian directors from Israel, similar portrayals of movement between places and hybrid forms of political subversion appear. The award winning *Be Quiet* (Sameh Zoabi, 2005) is a short fiction that unfolds on the road between Jenin (in the PA) and Nazareth (in Israel), creating a cinematic space of 'in-betweenness' and putting the emphasis on the journey itself.¹⁸⁶ It is in this liminal space and during the journey that possibilities of transgression are opened up, specifically with relation to the generational conflict that I discussed at some length in the previous chapter. The plot of the film revolves around the journey home of young Ibrahim and his father, who are Israeli citizens, from a funeral of Ibrahim's uncle in Jenin. The geographically short journey between the two towns is proven to be strewn with obstacles, as the father and son go through several incidents that risk their safe arrival home, in Nazareth. The father is aware of it and his fear shows, but the boy seems oblivious to it all. In each of these incidents, that are charged with heightened suspense and potent with explosive energy, things could have ended really badly but they do not and the journey continues. However, something else starts to happen during the journey: Ibrahim gradually rebels against the authority of his father.

¹⁸⁶ Zoabi was born in 1975 and grew up in the village Iksal near Nazareth. He graduated with a BA in film studies from Tel Aviv University and with a Masters Degree in film direction from Colombia University. *Be Quiet* started as his graduation film and was supported and distributed by the French company Méroé.

The father, wary of the dangers that lie ahead, orders Ibrahim at the outset of their journey to “be quiet”, but Ibrahim keeps asking questions. Initially he wants to know why his uncle died, and when his father dismisses him with a lie, saying that he died of heart problems, he defies: “but my uncle was young”. Later, when they are caught in crossfire between an Israeli sniper and Palestinian fighters, but are eventually allowed to go on because they have Israeli number plates, Ibrahim wants to know why the number plates of his grandfather’s car in Jenin differ from theirs. “Why is our plate yellow and grandpa’s blue?”, he asks. “So that they could tell the difference between Palestinians and Israelis”, says the father. “Who will tell?”, asks Ibrahim. “People”, shrugs the father. “I don’t understand”, insists Ibrahim, “we are Palestinians”. The father looks back at him annoyed as they approach the checkpoint.

At the checkpoint, set in the back seat, Ibrahim watches his father being searched by an Israeli soldier. Doing his best not to get into trouble, the father submissively does as he is told, but Ibrahim refuses to give his bag to the soldier for a search. “He is a pain in the ass” the father says to the soldier. He snatches the bag from Ibrahim and hands it to the soldier. The check is over and they are allowed to proceed but when the father puts Ibrahim’s belongings back in the bag he discovers a *kaffia* (the traditional headscarf) stained in blood. When he rushes away from the checkpoint, he says to Ibrahim “you almost got us arrested, is this what you wanted?” and Ibrahim replies angrily “I don’t like them”.



Ibrahim watching his father being searched in *Be Quiet*

At the peak of the confrontation between the father and the son, while the father has stopped to check on the family's field, Ibrahim picks up a stone and aims at his father. He misses, and the stray stone hits a Jewish car that passes by. The father humbly apologizes to the driver "it was my son, he says, he aimed at me". Later in the car, when his father tells him off, Ibrahim confronts him directly. "You lied to me", he says, "you let the soldiers order you around and now you order me around".

The journey is not completed during the course of the film. The film ends at a random point along the road before the two arrive in Nazareth, but the narrative subtly suggests that Ibrahim has won. After the last incident, in a final attempt to console Ibrahim, the father, who previously insisted on hearing the news programmes in Arabic, adheres to Ibrahim's wishes and offers to put on some music. "Here's some music", he says smilingly. "Do you like it? It's an old Arab song". "It's boring", says Ibrahim. As the image fades to black, the father's voice is heard saying "let's try something else...", and the film abruptly ends.

The aesthetic Zoabi adopts resembles Abbas Kiarostami's films *Ten* (2002) and *Close Up* (1990), where the majority of the film is shot in close-up, inside a car. The difference between the points of view of the son in the back seat and the father in the driver seat, as well as the space between them, are emphasized by the camera with close shots and alternate angles. The film's minimalist approach – both in terms of narrative and

aesthetics – evokes two layers of meaning at the same time. On the one hand, it is a realistic depiction of everyday life under the conditions of conflict. What the father and son go through in the course of their short journey - the checkpoint, the cross fire, the encounter with the Jewish car - is a reflection of the all too familiar day to day reality in the PA in the post-Oslo period. At the same time, the seemingly trivial dialogue between the father and the son, which is tied to the realistic narrative, also begs symbolic reading. The dialogue about the number plates is, obviously, a form of imaginative transgression over the imposed boundaries between Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line and Ibrahim's proclamation of his own identity position in opposition to his father's. The scene in which Ibrahim attempts to throw a stone at his father references the symbolic image of the 'children of the stones' and by so doing not only sends a clear message of resistance, but, again, transcends the division between Palestinians in Israel and those in the PA.¹⁸⁷ The father's lie about the cause of uncle Nader's death, and his command to "be quiet", resonate with the silence of the older generation against which the films discussed in the previous chapter have also rebelled. Finally, the dialogue around the music in the last scene of the film suggests that the road is now open for political as well as cultural change.

A Sense of Need (Hassa al-Haja, Shady Srur, 2003) tells a similar story of 'in-betweenness'. Here the story concerns Joseph, a Palestinian-Israeli grappling with his identity whilst studying music in the US.¹⁸⁸ The events take place a few days before Joseph's final exam, when he suddenly experiences a psychological state of synesthesia (a condition which can be described as hybridity and transgression of the senses) manifested also by hallucinations. The film moves between Joseph's hallucinations (including flashbacks to his life back in Israel/Palestine) and the reality in the US where he is under pressure to prepare for his exam. The synesthesia renders Joseph unable to

¹⁸⁷ The most iconic manifestation of resistance in the first *Intifada* were the children throwing stones at the Israeli Soldiers.

¹⁸⁸ Srur, like Zoabi, grew up in Nazareth, studied cinema in the USA and returned to Nazareth after his graduation. *Sense of Need*, his graduation film, was largely self-funded. It was shown in several special screenings across Israel and participated in a number of international festivals. In Israel the film's premier in the Cinemateque in Nazareth was organised by the NGO *Mossawa* and was well attended. International screenings include the London Palestinian Film Festival in 2005, the Chicago Palestinian Film Festival and the New York International Independent Film Festival. For more details see the film's website: <http://www.senseofneed.com>. Last retrieved 10. 8. 2010.

play the piano, the thing he not only loves most but which is his main form of expression. It is only through confronting questions about his identity that he is able to regenerate his ability to play. Srur himself plays Joseph, and creates a deliberate sense of confusion between his own biography and the fictitious character of Joseph. At one moment towards the end of the film, his lover addresses him as Shady rather than Joseph.

Like Zoabi, Srur positions Joseph physically in between Israel and the PA. As Joseph is seen explaining to an Italian hairdresser in San Francisco during the film, his house in Jerusalem stands “right in the middle between East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem...we have three bedrooms. My sister’s belongs to Israel and my mother’s to Palestine. Mine is right in the middle”.

Joseph’s liminal position is asserted at several points in the film. In one poignant scene Joseph has a flashback to a night search of his house in East Jerusalem. Resonating with similar scenes from other films about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the scene opens with the Israeli soldiers breaking into the house during an intimate moment when a Palestinian girl (from the PA) confesses her love for Joseph. Initially, the Israeli soldiers are depicted as senseless automaton figures, a depiction seemingly borrowed from Elia Suleiman’s films, but later this mode shifts to show a more complex and multi-layered ‘negotiation’ between the parties. As the scene unfolds, it is Joseph’s command of the four languages spoken in the room (Arabic, Hebrew, English and Russian) and his exclusive ability to oscillate between all points of view in the room (an Israeli soldier, a Russian-Israeli soldier and his Palestinian girlfriend) that manages to diffuse the potentially explosive situation. Joseph’s liminal position then assists him while he is confronted with the brutality of the Israeli occupation. As the personal home space is invaded by the Israeli occupier and by the uninvited Palestinian girl from East Jerusalem, Srur turns it into a space of negotiation and multiple perspectives. Joseph’s room, his personal place, his home, is not only liminal in the sense of being positioned on the border between Israel and Palestine but is also, I would argue, a Third Space, in

the sense of holding at once within it hybridities (of languages cultures and identity positions) and their internal contradictions.

Liminality is also suggested in the possibilities of switching identities. The film opens with a wide shot of the *Al Aksa* mosque in Jerusalem in 1999. Joseph's narration tells us that at his birth he was mistakenly swapped with a Jewish baby in the hospital. His mother spotted the mistake and returned the Jewish baby. "I often wonder" the narration says "what he must have felt when my mother rejected him, I wonder what he is doing now...I don't know what it means but I always believed it had something to do with my life". Later, Joseph is mistaken for a Jew by others. While in the US, he introduces himself as coming from Jerusalem and is embraced by representatives of both Jewish and Palestinian Diasporas, each assuming immediately that he "belongs" to them. In two virtually identical scenes in which Joseph undergoes a scan in a San-Francisco hospital, he is treated first by a Palestinian doctor and secondly by a Jewish doctor. In both scenes the doctors look at the notes and cry "So you are from Jerusalem?" and then embark on a monologue about 'their' Jerusalem. The Palestinian talks about his father's flight from Jerusalem in 1948 and the difficulties that the family underwent before they arrived in the US. The Jew talks about his mother, a Holocaust survivor, and the pressures put on him by his family to live in Jerusalem. Both doctors conclude by explaining that they really wanted to do something else but were confined by the circumstances of the conflict, and both give Joseph fatherly advice in Arabic and Hebrew respectively, to find his own way.

Joseph's struggle in the film is to define his own identity, moving away from the national divide that constructs the fixed identities of Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. His passion for music and art is not only related to his quest to break out of the confinements of the conflict, but also marks a space of cultural hybridity. As in *Be Quiet*, and like in the films of young directors that I discussed in chapter four (albeit in a somewhat more experimental style) the narrative arrives at a resolution (Joseph overcomes his psychological condition and is able to play) at a point when Joseph proclaims an active move forward. In his final hallucination Joseph meets God, in an

image of himself. God's message to Joseph is to set himself free from the constraints of the conflict. Towards the end of the conversation between them, Joseph says "I am heading for the same point where I began!, but there are two ways, forward and backward". "It's so simple, it's a matter of choice", says God, and the conversation ends when he proclaims "Forward".



Joseph as God in *A Sense of Need*

If in *Be Quiet* and *A Sense of Need* the films' location is the liminal space between Israel and the PA, in films such as *Paradise Lost*, *Private Investigation*, *On Hold* (Rokaya Sabbah, 2007), *Red and Blue* (Khaled Idris, 2001) and *Ajami* (Scandar Copti and Yaron Shani, 2009) the filmmakers/subjects move in between spaces: inside Israel, between Israel and the PA and between Palestine/Israel and Europe, crossing, and at times transgressing, real and imaginary borders. Liminality here is manifested visually and thematically in camera movements between locations in Palestine/Israel, where the subjects of the films 'operate', and in the way in which the films juxtapose these places in relation to one another.

In *Paradise Lost* and *Private Investigation*, discussed at length in the previous chapter, the move in time, in search of history, is intertwined with a move in space, as the filmmakers move to and away from home (Fureidis and Nazareth respectively) in

search of a place of belonging. Similarly, Khaled Idris's *Blue and Red*, which I do not discuss at length, is a short documentary in which the director travels back and forth from his home in the Arab village Tamra in the Galilee to his uncle's home in Jordan, attempting to piece together the story of the family torn apart in 1948. We see Idris going back and forth from his father to his uncle, asking them to tell him 'their story' (and the two stories that emerge are different) while his own contemplations and understandings are given to us in voice over, as he is driving along the road.

Rokaya Sabbah's *On Hold* (2007) is a meditation of the director and her husband on the question of leaving Israel for Spain, in search of a place to call home. The opening sequence is an up-beat montage, which playfully visualises the question at stake. An image of the map of Israel appears on screen with a small toy house, which indicates the different places and the transitions between them. The first place on the map is Sabbah's home village Tu'ran in the Galilee. A montage of images from the village is followed by an image of Sabbah waking up from a nightmare and packing a suitcase in haste, which then leads us back to the map. The toy house moves to Jerusalem, where the collage of images from the old city, suggestive of religious fanaticism and conflicts, ends with a close up of Sabbah expressing despair. The house then moves to Tel Aviv, where a collage of images of cafés and shops ends with Sabbah meeting her future husband, Jameel. A red heart shape floats onto screen, while the two kiss, and dissolves back to the map. The house then moves to Haifa.

This short sequence draws our attention from the outset, not only to the movement between places as part of a 'search of identity', but to the different contemporary imaginaries of the spaces themselves. The village, the space of tradition; Jerusalem, the space occupied by politics and religion; Tel Aviv, the space of freedom and modernity; and Haifa, the space demonstrating mixture and hybridity.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Haifa, with its historical significance as a coastal liberal Palestinian town, with its socialist and secular background since the establishment of Israel and with its mixed population (of Palestinians, Russian new immigrants and Israeli Jews) is increasingly becoming a hub of vibrant Palestinian youth culture and is often described as the new Arab 'Yappie land'. For many young artists, writers and activists it is the place of choice. For example Suha Arraf, who over the years lived in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ramalla, told me in interview that she eventually decided to settle in Haifa "because this is the most normal place in Israel/Palestine...Haifa is really mixed and I don't believe in separation".

The film then moves to follow Rokaya and Jameel as they move between friends and family members to discuss their decision to leave, seeking their blessing, support and advice. We see them in friends' and family's homes, at dinner parties and friendly gatherings, at Holiday festivals in Nazareth and Haifa and on walks through parks and along the sea shore. As with *Paradise Lost* and *Private Investigation*, these home spaces are presented in their everyday functionality: intimate, warm and 'lived-in'.

Yet, the conversations examine dilemmas of identities, cultural values and belonging. As the film shows, Rokaya and Jameel, like many of their counterparts, are torn between individual aspirations and ideological commitment to the national interest of their community. They feel excluded from Israeli society and find it difficult to realise their talents and abilities in the discriminatory environment of Israel, but feel equally excluded in other Arab countries or in the PA. In this state of affairs, "abroad", specifically in this case Europe, is seen as a desired option. As Jameel says to an Israeli-Jewish friend during the film "for our children...we want to live in a place where they would be equal to everyone else".

The intimate and honest conversations throughout the film expose without inhibition an array of the standpoints of young Palestinians in Israel, allowing the contradictions and ambivalence to surface. They meet with friends who left Israel and returned, and with friends who contemplate leaving; with an actress friend who eventually settled (for) Tel Aviv and with her sister the curator who works in East Jerusalem; with fellow Palestinian friends who swear to stay in Haifa and with an Israel-Jewish couple that deliberate over similar dilemmas of identity and belonging; with Sabbah's sister who moved with her family to an affluent Jewish settlement in the Galilee and with a musician friend who strategically shifts between identities, using in some contexts his Arab name and in others a 'Hebrew' version of it (the two sound very similar).

All of these standpoints are far from unique in contemporary Israel and each in one way or another is liminal. In the face of national and religious discourses that insist on dichotomies, Sabbah allows her camera to capture a reality in which the use of Hebrew and Arabic commonly mixed, in which inter-marriages (Jameel is Christian and Rokaya is Muslim) and alliances exist and in which identities are performed strategically.

Ajami (2009), is a dramatic tale of Jaffa told from the multiple perspectives of Jews and Arabs, which I discuss in more detail in the next section. While the plot mainly relates to Ajami, the Arab neighborhood of Jaffa, it occasionally takes us to other Arab spaces in Israel such as Lod, Ramle and the Bedouin town of Tel Sheva. These places are positioned on the margins of the mixed cities, and, as we see the characters arrive in them, an alternative map of Israel, a map 'from the margins', emerges. In addition, several characters move between places in Israel/Palestine, poignantly outlining the differences between them. Malek, a Palestinian youngster from the West Bank, moves between his village, next to Nablus, and Jaffa where he works illegally. Binj moves back and forth from Jaffa, where he lives and works, to Tel Aviv, where he and his Jewish girlfriend live. Malek's movement in this space, marked by blockades and impediments, draws attention to the focus of many of the 'roadblock movies'. In contrast, Binj, played by the filmmaker (Copti), operates not only in the liminal space between Israel and Palestine but also embodies the possibility of what Bhabha referred to as the subversive power of hybridity and what bell hooks referred to as the 'radical openness' that the position on the margin sometimes allows (1990). In *Ajami* the character of Binj occupies this space, albeit temporarily. Using a Western nickname rather than an Arab name, Binj's free movement between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, being at home and not at home in both places at once, transgresses the social and mental borderline between Jaffa and Tel Aviv and affords him a multiple perspective, that resonates with hooks's notion of radical openness (1990). It is worth noting that Binj's characterization is similar to other subjects in Israeli documentaries and suggestive of the same 'radical openness', especially when moving between Jaffa and Tel-Aviv. Resonating with what Gold (2007) has noted about the subject of the Israeli documentary *The South: Alice Never Lived Here* (Senyora Bar David, 1998), Binj is allowed a perspective, which possesses an

“understanding of both margin and centre and a dialectical look from the inside out and from the outside in” (229).

The Arab town: images of dysfunction

As I have already noted, in their depiction of Palestinian locales in contemporary Israel, either Arab towns or neighbourhoods in mixed cities, these films expose the processes of a ‘creative destruction’ of the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity, and by so doing address its inherent contradictions and ambivalence. In these films, the machinery of the occupation, soldiers, checkpoints and roadblocks, so often seen in Palestinian films are absent from the space. Instead, the Palestinian spaces are seen as closed worlds, whose boundaries are outlined by their marginality within the Israeli space. Often this is achieved by marking the diminishing Arab space in relation to the expansion of the Israeli Jewish space, as well as by visual signs of the economic gap between affluent Jewish and decayed Arab spaces. Thematically and visually, these films address discrimination and deprivation, portraying broken communities characterised by inner conflicts and lack of communication, often riddled with crime, rivalries and despair. In these depictions homes and private spaces often stand in sharp contrast to public spaces. Homes are often, described as intimate and loving, while the public sphere, the town and the wider Israel/Palestine space, are hostile and dysfunctional.

Absence and stagnation

In *Chronicle of a Disappearance* Nazareth is characterised as a personal place, undisturbed by the politics of the conflict. The private home of Suleiman’s parents is a space where daily life unfolds in what appears to be a peaceful and quiet routine, existing in isolation from its context. As Gertz and Khleifi (2008) claim, unlike in many other Palestinian films, the private home here is not an integral part of the public space and does not metonymically represent the space of Palestine (173). The private home is marked as the only place of belonging. This is implicitly suggested throughout the film but is stated explicitly in a caption at end of the film that reads “to my mother and father, the last homeland”. Suleiman himself, and his camera, (both the diegetic camera, which Suliman uses, and the camera off screen) set their gaze closely upon the mundane

routine of the home space. We see lingering close-ups of the father's body parts as he falls asleep in front of the television, long realist takes of him feeding his beloved bird, or playing Backgammon on the computer or of the parents cleaning fish for dinner or the mother entertaining a group of women, during which a long conversation about peeling garlic is overheard.

However, while daily life exists and the private home is portrayed with intimacy and love, the public space of Nazareth itself is a closed and rather empty world, where stagnation was rife. While there is no evidence of the political conflict, or generally of Israel, we are shown internal divisions and petty rivalries between families, neighbours and friends. Suleiman's time in Nazareth passes in a series of repetitions in which nothing really happens to anyone. This is demonstrated perhaps most clearly in the repetitive scene of Suleiman visiting a friend at his souvenir shop at the centre of the old city. No one ever enters the shop and the corner of the street in which it stands is empty most times. Suleiman and his friend sit in silence, smoking or drinking coffee, occasionally a passer by waves hello, but mostly the scene is virtually motionless. At one of these repetitions the static filmic image turns into a still photograph, which is later revealed as one of the filmmaker's slides. Another repetitive scene depicts a café. The same men sit in the café day after day, mostly motionless, watching the empty road in front of them. Day after day car skids to a halt and two men step out fighting. The men at the café mediate to calm the two and get them back into the car. The car then drives away.

Bresheeth (2002b) relates the stagnation, absence and silence in Suleiman's film to his wider claim about melancholia in Palestinian films, discussed in the previous chapter. According to Bresheeth, "if much of Israeli cinema deals with the liminality of the process of becoming, it befits Palestinian films to deal with the liminality of loss and disappearance – of country, of the people, of the Self" (73). In *Chronicle*, Bresheeth argues, the quality of melancholia, an unconscious perpetual sense of loss characterised also by losing one's voice, and its intrinsic connection to narcissism, are manifested both in the silence and stillness in which the film's imagery is steeped, as well as in the self-

image of the director around which the film is constructed (ibid: 79). The laconic screen persona of the director, “an iconic Palestinian clown”, is the mirror – in a Lacanian sense – through which we see ourselves (ibid.).

This dysfunctionality of the Palestinian community in Israel becomes the core of Suleiman’s criticism of the ‘creative distraction’ processes of Israeli colonialism that drove Nazareth to its contemporary state and is directed towards Israel as well as his own community.¹⁹⁰ Yet, the connections with the Israeli mechanism of colonialism are not *seen* in the film; as Gertz and Khleifi (2008) put it “if anything is demonstrated in this film about the Palestinian experience... it is done inadvertently, coincidentally, and indistinctly, and as part of a spectrum of many diverse meanings” (174).

Thus, if the national space is absent from Nazareth and the home space is functional and intimate but closed, the public domain of the locale, where some sense of community resides, is dysfunctional and hostile. In the Nazareth of Suleiman’s later films, *Divine Intervention* (2002) and *The Time that Remains* (2009) the hostility between people escalates and the dysfunction of the community is represented more forcefully. If in *Chronicle* this hostility was mainly expressed in petty quarrels and gossip, in *Divine* it is more explicit and violent. According to Gertz and Khleifi (2008) a comparative analysis of the two films reveals “what had transpired in Palestinian society in general and in its cinema in particular during the period between the Oslo agreement and the Second Intifada” (171).¹⁹¹ In *The Time that Remains*, there is little left of Arab Nazareth. The transformation, the process of disappearance that Suleiman alerts us to in *Chronicle*, is nearly complete. Here, in the scenes that take place in contemporary Nazareth, the director’s old mother is completely silent and unable to function on her own. A Filipina carer and a young Palestinian-Israeli policeman, the nature of whose relationship remains ambiguous, run the household in a manner that can only be described as

¹⁹⁰In Nazareth these processes entangled the transformation of Arab Nazareth into a Jewish space. For a detailed account of this process during the first decade of Israel see: Jeremy Forman 2007; Samir Srouji, 2006.

¹⁹¹ Gertz and Khleifi point out that in *Divine*, the landscape shrinks. There are no open spaces and daily life are no longer possible. For example, the house in Nazareth is reduced to the kitchen (ibid.). The house in Nazareth is reduced to the kitchen).

surreal. The policeman, always in uniform, is mainly engaged in cooking and cleaning. The Filipino carer, addressing Suleiman's mother constantly as "Ima" (Hebrew for 'mother') and speaking in a mixture of English and Arabic, seems to be the only person in charge. In one poignant scene, during a quiet family evening she entertains the policeman, Suleiman and his mother with a cheesy American song accompanied by a home Karaoke machine. What has emerged out of the disappearance of Arab Nazareth is a hybrid and functionalist Westernised culture, which is ruled by consumerism and individualist values and which lacks any sense of history, identity or community.

Similar portrayals of contemporary Arab locales in Israel appear in the films of younger directors. In Kamal Aljafari's *The Roof* and *Port of Memory*, his home town Ramle and his family's original home town in Jaffa, are also portrayed as spaces blighted by stagnation and marked by absence.¹⁹² Images of derelict buildings and urban decay dominate both films and the camera lingers on spaces of absence. For example, we see long takes and slow camera movements over sites such as the old cemetery in Ramle or a wasteland area on the coast of Jaffa, as well as detailed shots of ruins of old houses, dirt and rubble. As with *Chronicle*, the public areas of the cities (more specifically the Arab neighbourhoods in these mixed cities), the streets, cafés and shops are empty and quiet, and the films' subjects move within them in isolation. In a talk at the London Palestinian Film Festival this year, the director explained: "I am interested in absence. Jaffa or Ramle don't look like that. These are very noisy and crowded places normally. I had to work hard during the production to clear the streets".¹⁹³

The films focus on the director's immediate family and are centered around their homes: his parents' home in Ramle and his uncle's home in Jaffa (where his grandmother also lives).¹⁹⁴ As with *Chronicle*, Aljafari documents the minute details of everyday life inside the home with great attention. Here also everyday routines, such as

¹⁹² Both *The Roof* and *Port of Memory* were funded by German funds and produced with mix crews of internationals and Israelis.

¹⁹³ London Palestinian Film Festival, 8.5.2010.

¹⁹⁴ In the same talk Aljafari said: "I think that I became a filmmaker because of my family". See footnote 198.

eating, sleeping, cleaning, unfold quietly, undisturbed by the outside world, and the same sense of 'a world in stagnation' hovers above the space.

However, if the home in *Chronicle* was isolated from the public domain, the locale and the national, and Israel was largely absent, in Aljafari's films the home is placed within the context of contemporary Israel. The marginality of the Arab neighbourhoods within the contemporary Israeli space is seen in the films' texts, and the link between the decay and stagnation of the Arab space and Israel's colonialist discourse of Euro-modernity is rendered more explicit.

The marginality of the Arab space is marked in several ways. Aljafari addresses the on-going process of 'creative destruction' in the narrative of the films. *Port of Memory* depicts the process of gentrification of Jaffa, as the film follows the struggle of Aljafari's uncle to push away forceful initiatives of gentrification made by the authorities, as well as by kind Israeli Jews who are enchanted by the beauty of the place and offer to buy it. The home in Jaffa is still under threat 62 years after the Nakba. Yet, rather than conducted within a national discourse *per se*, in this case, the intensive gratification of contemporary Jaffa reveals, as Daniel Monterescu claims, "new forms of pro-urban neo-liberal agency" which conceal "an implicit set of colonial tropes and Orientalist interpretative schemata" (2009: 645).¹⁹⁵

In *The Roof* the marginality of the Palestinians inside Israel, as it is manifested in the urban experience of Ramle, is proclaimed by one of the inhabitants of the city when speaking to camera:

Ramle is one of the oldest cities in Israel. It was a very important crossroads...wherever you wanted to go, you had to pass through Ramle: from Lid to Beer Elasbee, from Haifa to Tel Aviv, from Jaffa to Jerusalem. What is Ramle like today? It has 67,000 inhabitants. They brought in lots of Russians, who took over the place. The market is in the hands of Iraqi Jews, the Arabs have no say anymore. We have only a Mini market and a corner

¹⁹⁵ See: Monterescu (2009) for a detailed and fascinating discussion of the contemporary neo-liberal discourse of the gentrification of Jaffa as well as the transformations in Israel 'Urban Orientalism' since 1948.

shop. The rest is in the hands of Israelis: Turks, Iraqis – as long as they are Jews and not Arabs. This is our country and we became its tail...

The marginality is also revealed in relation to the economic gap as seen in a short scene when a Jewish resident of the city comes to have his tyre fixed in the family's garage, or when a seemingly mundane driving lesson turns into a tour of Ramle that reveals the gap between the affluent and well preserved Jewish parts of the city and the decaying Arab neighbourhood. Secondly, the films mark the marginality of the Palestinians within the Israeli space visually. At times the visuals suggest it explicitly as in *The Roof*, where the process of 'Judaisation' is seen in close-up shots of street signs that direct our attention to the renaming of places. Old Arab streets are now named after European Jewish figures like Dr. Koch, or Dr. Zigmund Freud. More implicitly, the marginality is seen in the direction of the gaze in the diegetic world of both films (as well as at times in that of the camera) from the inside (the home) to the outside (the rest of the world).

The protagonists in both films are seen repetitively looking, motionless, at the outside world: friends sitting in cafés gaze on the outside (the street) rather than at one another; Aljafari and his brother sitting in the family's garage looking at images of Israeli-Jews in a Hebrew newspaper; Aljafari's mother is often depicted looking outside through the bars of her living room window, or on the roof of the house looking at the street; the uncle is seen in different scenes looking at the sea; the director is seen looking at Tel-Aviv-Jaffa from the vantage point of Migdal Shalom, the first sky scraper of Tel Aviv and finally, in one of the more poignant images in *The Roof*, the camera sets its gaze at the affluent Tel-Aviv that lies along the shore, from the point of view of the decayed shoreline of Jaffa.



Tel Aviv seen from the destroyed port of Jaffa in *The Roof*



Aljafari's mother looking out of the window in *The Roof*

The gaze is also directed at the outside world as projected by the media. In both films we see excessive long takes of the protagonists watching television, either together or alone. The television is always present, always on, and always loud. The direction of the gaze, from inside to outside, and the contrast between the quiet and stillness of the home environment and the action and sound on screen reinforce the sense that life, *real active* life, takes place somewhere else.

Further, at several points, in both films, the gaze of the protagonists to the outside reveals, in turn, snippets of *Other* imaginaries of Jaffa, primarily that of the Zionist discourse. At two points in *Port of Memory* the viewer shares the protagonists' point of view watching television, and the film on screen moves to the centre of the shot, allowing us to watch it. In one scene we see the neighbour watching a film about the life of Jesus, evoking religious imaginaries of the Holy Land. At another time, the film playing on television is Menahem Golan's Hollywood action film *The Delta Force* (1986). In the specific clip we see, Delta Force, a special US army unit, is fighting Lebanese terrorists in the streets of Beirut, with the help of Israeli intelligence. Golan, a Hollywood based Israeli director, filmed the scene, which supposedly took place in a Beirut military compound, in the streets of Ajami. *The Delta Force* evokes one of the conflicting aspects of the Zionist (and in many cases Western) Orientalist imagination of Jaffa as a place of political violence and strangeness.¹⁹⁶ In another scene in the film, the roaming camera comes to rest upon a neighbour's house (a beautiful old building with stained glass windows and decorative mosaic ceilings) to observe a shoot for another film that is taking place there. We see the film crew stripping the house of its everyday objects, the family's furniture and decorations. In the empty space, which is now the film's set, a Russian Jew recites in Hebrew with a heavy accent: "I made these windows with my bare hands... the ceiling is also mine". The scene is not contextualised, Aljafari does not give us details about the actual event (we do not know what the shoot is for or who is making it or whether or not this scene is staged), instead, it is left to be read as a metonym for the Israeli process of colonialisation as a whole.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ See: Monterescu, 2009 for a discussion on the different images of Jaffa in Israeli culture.

¹⁹⁷ In interview Aljafari said that he happened to stumble up on the shoot while filming. London Palestinian Film Festival, 8.5.2010.

Finally, towards the end of the film, Aljafari's uncle Salim is seen gazing at the sea, while music from the Israeli popular film *Casablan* is heard and a scene from the film unfolds. The musical *Casablan* (1974), also directed by Golan, was an adaptation to a play written in 1954. Part of the popular "Bourekas" genre that focused on the ethnic tensions between *Mizrahim* and *Ashkenazim*, the film played a constitutive role in the reproduction of Jaffa's image after 1948. As Monterescu (2009) puts it "it encapsulates the depiction of the city as a battlefield of ethnic strife, working class culture, crime and immigration" (655). The film deals with the assimilation of the *Mizrahim* into the Israeli imagined collective, through the forbidden love story of Casablan, a young Moroccan Israeli (a war veteran who is now a delinquent living in Jaffa) and an Ashkenazi middle class girl.¹⁹⁸ In the clip that Aljafari includes, we see Casablan, at a crisis point of the plot, walking along the Jaffa shore leading to the abandoned port while reminiscing about his home town in Morocco. He sings:

There is a place beyond the sea,
Where the sand is white and home is warm.
Where the sun shines over the market, the street and the port.
Home is there, beyond the sea.
I remember the candles burning on Sabbath,
and my father looks at me in silence.
It's a far away place, a wonderful place.
From every window you could hear a prayer,
In the courtyard a mother and a daughter, baking bread for the Sabbath...

Aljafari superimposed onto the old film footage an image of his uncle, first, for a split second, peeping at Casablan from a derelict building, and at the end of the clip walking along the empty streets of the port with the fictional character. As the film's clip fades the uncle is left to walk these streets alone.

¹⁹⁸ The forbidden love is a common narrative device in Israeli cinema. see: Yosefa Loshitzky, 2001. It is interesting to note that in the film the tale ends happily when Casablan marries the girl and the ethnic communities merge. In the original play the ending is different, see: Monterescu, 2009: 656. For a discussion of the film in relation to Israeli Mizrahi and Ashkenazi masculinities see: Raz Yosef, 2004 pp. 98-103.



The uncle's image superimposed on the footage of *Casablanca* in *Port of Memory*

The scene's meanings are of course multiple, ambivalent and open. *Casablanca* ironically yearns for an Arab space beyond the sea, while walking the streets of a destroyed Arab city. He also yearns for a place of tradition, or at least a place where tradition and history were allowed to exist. However, this yearning is in itself Orientalist in its imagination of the places from which the Arab Jews came. In the plot of the film the 'traditionalism' of the Arab Jews in Ajami stands in contrast to the secular and modern Ashkenazi space of Tel Aviv. It is seen also as the root of the difficulties they have encountered in trying to assimilate into the Israeli collective. Yet the desire itself, for a place beyond the sea, where everybody came from, is deliberately meant to strike a chord with Israeli audiences, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi alike, for it speaks to an Israeli imagination, whose relation to place, as I alluded to before, is intrinsically ambivalent. Thus, Aljafari's inclusion of the clip both reminds us that Israelis came from elsewhere and evokes the gap in the Israeli imaginary between the concrete place and the Utopian (exclusively) Jewish space.

Palestinians do not exist in the Jaffa of *Casablan*, and the images we see correspond with the dominant representation of Jaffa in the Israeli discourse of the time (Monterescu, 2009). The Jaffa, whose streets Casablan walks, is nothing but a wasteland. It cannot offer Casablan a cultural home and his longings are indeed for somewhere else. The irony of both places being Arab, may well have been lost on Israeli audiences of the time. Yet, beyond this reference to the Israeli Orientalist imaginary, what nuances this scene so poignantly is the imaginative space that the film creates, in which the uncle and Casablan are both placed within the deserted space of Jaffa. Aljafari here both engages with Israeli popular culture and subverts it by creating 'interventions' within it. The scene draws our attention to the cultural links between Palestinians and Arab Jews, both marginalised by the Zionist discourse, and sets up a dialectical relationship between the uncle and Casablan, in which both affiliations and contradictions exist. In so doing, I suggest, Aljafari constructs Jaffa, if only for a brief moment, as a 'third space', by opening up new alternatives of identification.

Finally, as in *Chronicle*, in both *Port of Memory* and *The Roof* there exists no sense of community or solidarity in Jaffa or in Ramle. Here, this is manifested in a lack of communication. Silence dominates both films and the isolation of the subjects is emphasised by the camera. For example, the subjects of the films are hardly seen looking each other in the eye. Even in scenes where the family members talk to each other their gaze is directed elsewhere, often at the television. In *Port of Memory* the film cuts a number of times between the uncle's home, where we see Aljafari's aunt taking care of the elderly grandmother, and the neighbour's home, where we see the neighbour, who also takes care of her elderly mother, going through the same daily routines. Yet the two never meet, talk or seek comfort from each other. Aljafari explained: "in reality this neighbour and my aunt are best friends, but in the film they do not meet because I wanted to reinforce the break down of the community".¹⁹⁹

Chaos and Fragmentation

¹⁹⁹ Talk at the London Palestinian Film Festival, 8.5.2010.

If Aljafari's and Suleiman's films deal with Zionism's 'creative destruction' with images marked by absence, other films engage with similar issues – marginality and disfranchisement – by projecting a community caught in a state of chaos and fragmentation.

Ibtisam Mara'ana's film *Al Jiser* tells the story of a village of the same name, a neighbouring village of Mara'ana's home village Fureidis, along the coastal plain. Al Jiser is one of the most neglected and overlooked Arab villages in Israel. With its high crime rate, deprivation and unemployment it is marginalised not only within the Israeli space at large but also within the Palestinian society in Israel. This, as the film tells us, is manifested in the poor relationship of the village people with the Palestinian community in the Galilee, who often refuse to have anything to do with people from Al Jiser. Mara'ana's film focuses on the marginality of the village, whose residents feel estranged from Israeli society as a whole and from Palestinian community in Israel, and within that, on a number of young single men and women who are marginalised within the village. The main protagonists of the film, Hamama, and Yousef, whose story runs in parallel to hers, are positioned geographically and socially on the fringes of this village's (already marginalised) community.

Visually, the film often depicts the village's entrapment between the highway (one of the major routes through Israel) and the affluent neighbouring Jewish town of Caesarea on the coast. Similar to Aljafari's films, the marginality of Al Jiser is exposed through the camera's position, capturing Caesarea from the point of view of Al Jiser, and by so doing drawing our attention to the processes of 'creative destruction' that left the village in a state of deprivation and stagnation. Images of the entrapped village are often contrasted with the many open shots of the sea and the sky, which enhance the protagonists' longing for freedom.

Hamama, who seeks to break out of the constraints of the village's economic and political decay and its patriarchal social order, is often positioned outside of the village: on rooftops, on the bridge that crosses the highway or on the sea shore. The camera shares her point of view looking at the village from 'the outside in'. Yousef, the

fisherman, is mostly seen in the sea and talks at length about the place on the margins, the sea, as a place of freedom.

Al Jiser's story line follows the local election in the village and Hamama's diligent campaign against the Islamist party in power. If the Arab spaces within Israel in the films of Aljafari were marked by stagnation and absence, *Al Jiser* is revealed in this film as a space in a state of chaos and fragmentation. Scenes that unfold inside the village, depict corrupt local politics, crime and violence between the village people, and social relations lacking in a sense of community or solidarity.

The film ends as the election results are announced. Hamama's campaign failed, the Islamist party won again and Hamama desperately contemplates leaving the village. Mara'ana ends the film with a short scene in which Hamama stands on one of the rooftops overlooking the village. There, she says to the camera "... I only think about one thing, travelling abroad. People in this village have stopped loving each other. The village isn't good any more". The close-up from Hamama's face cuts to the final shot of the film –migrating birds crossing the blue sky above the village. This treatment of space echoes *Paradise Lost*, where the location of the sea is also symbolically used to signify freedom. Significantly, the location of the penultimate scene in *Paradise Lost*, where the concluding conversation between Mara'ana and Suad - after which Mara'ana decides to leave the village - takes place on the sea shore of Tantura.

Ajami, co-directed by the Jewish-Israeli director Yaron Shani and the Palestinian-Israeli director Scandar Copti, is set, like *Port of Memory*, in the Arab neighbourhood of Ajami in Jaffa and depicts the community's dysfunctional condition. Yet, if Aljafari depicts Ajami as a space marked by absence, Copti and Shani depict it as chaotic. The film was born out of a three-year drama workshop he held with residents of the Arab neighbourhood of Ajami in Jaffa. The film won considerable success in Israel and was Israeli Oscar nomination in 2010.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ *Ajami* was one of the five nominees for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar in 2010. Among its international prizes are certificate of distinction in the Camera d'Or in Cannes Film Festival (2009) and the Sutherland first-feature award at the London Film Festival in 2010. The film also won prestigious Israeli awards such as the Ophir Award for Best Film of the Israel Film Academy and the Wolgin Award of

The construction of the home space *vis-a-vis* the public space is similar to that of Suleiman's and Aljafari's films. The home is a place of love and intimacy, where daily life unfolds, and the public space is hostile and, in this film, even dangerous. In the world of *Ajami* danger awaits anyone who steps out of the home space, from Arab and Jewish residents of the neighbourhood, to Jews in Tel Aviv and the Israeli police, referred to in the local argot as the 'government'. Simialr to *Al Jiser*, *Ajami*'s film language emphasises chaos and fragmentation. Ajami here is an urban ghetto with a language of its own: Hebrew and Arabic used in a mixture, along with specific coded slang. Here, as one of the characters says, "there is no municipality, and no law". The rules here, as another character says, are like "in the jungle, the strong eats the weak".

In contrast to the other films discussed here, *Ajami* is motivated by drama. Things happen to the characters, dramatic things. The spaces depicted in the film are closely related to the dramatic action and the development of the plot, and there are few expressive depictions of space. The visual approach is predominantly realist, and at times a hand-held camera depicts more dramatic scenes in a wobbly *verité* style. Although the film is dramatic, and its style borrows from mainstream street dramas, the film's realist visual language and its process of production remind us that it bears close relation to the reality of Jaffa. The film itself was motivated by Copti's local activism and involved the residents of the neighbourhoods. The production process, which lasted several years, started with a storytelling and acting workshop which Shani and Copti held in the neighbourhood. The ideas for the original script and the specific plot lines were developed out of stories a group of residents raised in this workshop and many of the film's actors were cast from the same group. During filming, in order to keep the film "raw and real", as Copti explained to me in interview, the actors were given only general plot lines but not a scripted dialogue and were encouraged to improvise during the filming. Similarly, Copti said that they tried to shoot most scenes in one take.

Jerusalem Film Festival. It received rave reviews in Israel had significant success in attracting a large number of viewers. Following the film's success the neighborhood has become a local tourist attraction.

The chaotic Jaffa that Copti and Sahni constructed is a hub of contradictions and ambivalence, in which we are presented with multiple points of view, none of them privileged by the film with greater morality or justification.²⁰¹ The film's structure is only partly linear; it is divided into four chapters, each, in a *Rashomon* style, adds information about the events from a different point of view. While full details of the events transpire at the film's conclusion, specifically to the viewer not to the characters, the narrative is at times circular, turning back on itself, and some storylines are not fully motivated or developed.

The plot revolves around several characters whose stories collide, in a bleak manner, to form what can only be described as a fatal 'tragedy of errors' fuelled by prejudice and misconceptions. At the beginning of the film, an innocent boy name Yihia is shot dead by the Bedouin gang who had mistaken him for Omar, one of the film's characters. Later Binj dies overdosing on cocaine but is mistakenly thought to have been killed by the police. Malek is killed by Dando, who mistakes him for his missing brother's killer. Moreover, not only does the narrative 'kill' the two characters that notably transgressed borders – either the tangible one, between the PA and Israel, or the mental one, between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, but the two mixed couples in the film are also eventually not able to fulfill their love. Omar the Muslim and Hadir the Christian are forced to separate by the Hadir's father, and Binj and his Jewish girlfriend were torn apart by Binj's death. Thus, while the filmmakers insisted upon the multiplicity of points of view, and by so doing constructed Ajami as a hybrid space of ambivalence and contradiction, where alternatives of transgression and hybridities are constantly under threat of extinction.

The film's working title was 'the city of strangers', after one of Jaffa's old nicknames. While the filmmakers eventually changed it for reasons of translation, according to

²⁰¹ In many ways, the image of Jaffa in the film resonates with Monterescu's ethnographic description of Jaffa. Monterescu (2006) writes: "Life in Jaffa embodies a similar inherent tension: it is a mixture of dense daily coexistence between Arabs and Jews interwoven with deep cultural distance: from the minute daily practices—shopping, dressing, discourse and table manners—through national identity. The combined effect of the actual coexistence, for over fifty years, along with the mere fact that the next-door-neighbor, the employer, or the employee are Jews, blurs the clean-cut dichotomous distinctions between 'us' and 'them'—distinctions which are cognitive but also moral. This condition creates a hybrid dialectic between closeness and remoteness, "here" and "there," 'otherness' and 'familiarity,' locals and foreigners, friends and enemies (130).

Copti, the working title encapsulated the message he wanted to convey. In an interview during the production of the film he told me: “there is no one Jaffa. Jaffa has many faces, and everyone has his own Jaffa. In this sense everybody is a stranger here”.²⁰² In an interview for the Tel-Aviv local newspaper *Ha’ir*, following the film’s release, he explained further:

Given the level of oppression that Palestinians in Jaffa experience, you could have expected that Jaffa’s residents would unite. But as the film shows, Jaffa is divided into a million pieces. This is what happens when a weakened minority is oppressed. People become individualists; we all start to care only for ourselves and our relatives. There is a rift between Muslims and Christians, between rich and poor and between educated and the uneducated. This is what the oppressor wants to achieve – to instill in you a sense that you are alone in the world. And it works, people start believing that they are less important, that they have no voice, that they can’t change their reality.²⁰³

Copti’s criticism is similar to Suleiman’s and Aljafari’s, but the film does not make explicit the connections between the conflict (in its manifestations inside Israel) and the Jaffa it depicts. Furthermore, the film’s narrative positions everyone as ‘victims’ of political circumstances, including the Israeli policeman. According to Copti, this was a deliberate strategy. In the same interview to *Ha’ir* he said:

The background to the reality shown in the film is known to everyone, it is obvious. Assigning blame would have only led to more alienation... as far as I am concerned the real achievement of the film is not the Oscar, but the fact that we managed to bring 200,000 Israelis to the cinema. What is most important to me was to see Jews identify with a Palestinian character, after 62 years of de-humanization....after all we wanted to make a film that will open people’s eyes.²⁰⁴

In its insistence on the inclusion of the Jewish policeman and not privileging any of the points of view the film constructs Jaffa as a ‘third space’, in which, despite the conflicts, all these perspectives cohabitate.

²⁰²Scandar Copti, interview 26.3.2008, Tel Aviv.

²⁰³ Shay Grinberg (19.3.2010) *Ha’ir*.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Copti here references the film’s final shot in which the boy Nasri says: “open your eyes”.

Finally, it is important to note that *Ajami* and Aljafari's films should be seen in the context of the recent cultural, academic and political interventions in Jaffa that have emerged since the events of October 2000. While Jaffa for many years was perceived as a place devoid of Palestinian political action (unlike Nazareth for example), the events of October 2000, as I have already noted briefly in chapter one, had a "paradoxical effect of triggering a political debate and activism, which sought to address Palestinian exclusion and collective memory in a public and direct way" (Monterescu, 2009: 665). While the film's narratives do not depict political action, the films themselves take part in a new surge of political activism in Jaffa, which is, importantly, local activism that is often manifested in joint Jewish-Palestinian initiative

Like the other films discussed in this chapter Nizar Hassan's earlier, and largely overlooked, documentary *Cut* (1999) engages with Zionism's 'creative destruction', which marginalised Arabs and 'Arabness' and renders them dysfunctional. However, while engaging with the marginality of 'Arabness' in Israel, *Cut* uniquely focuses on Palestinian places but on a Jewish *Moshav* called Agur, which sits on the land of the destroyed Arab village of Ajur and is populated by Mizrahi Jews. While the *Moshav* is Jewish, the film portrays its marginality within the Israeli space, and depicts internal rivalries and conflicts with the Israeli authorities, in similar ways to the films previously discussed.

The *Moshav* was established in the early 1950s, when the Israeli authorities forcefully settled its residents, Jewish Kurds from Turkey and Iraq, on the land of the recently deserted Arab village in order to establish an agricultural cooperative.²⁰⁵ The film opens with an interview with the elders, the heads of the two big families that run the *Moshav*.

²⁰⁵ During those years Israel operated centralised state policies of settlement, especially in relation to the influx of newcomers. For a detailed study of these policies, see: Zvi Efrat, 2004. The following quote from a speech given by the director the Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency, Levi Eshkol (later the second prime minister of Israel) captures something of spirit of the time. Speaking to the government about the problem of housing shortage, Eshkol said: "I have an idea that can help us out... there are, after all, hundreds of deserted Arab villages on the land... we should grab them, device a plan, and prepare them for the coming winter. We should then move dozens of families into each one, accompanied by experienced guides from the Kibutzim. Each group should be given tools and start working the land... What have we got to lose here?" (quoted in Efrat, 2004).



The elders of Agur telling their story in *Cut*

The elders' stories about the establishment of the *Moshav* undermine the Zionist narrative and expose the discourse of Euro-modernity that informed it. If in the Zionist narrative, as discussed in chapter one, Jews around the world have shared a similar history of persecution and were rescued by Zionism and the establishment of Israel, then the stories of the elders of Agur expose the factions and heterogeneity of the Israeli collective. Their stories delineate the policies of immigration and settlement during Israel's early years. As many other Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, the elders of Agur were prompted to immigrate to Israel by the Jewish Agency. As the elders testify, it was not Zionism, which the Jewish Agency propagated, that connected them to the idea of *Aliya* (immigrating to Israel) but religious sentiments of the kind prominent in worldwide Jewish communities for centuries.

On their arrival in Israel, regardless of their background, they were settled in Agur and forced into becoming farmers. The Jamo brothers recall their encounter with the Jewish Agency in Iraq, the difficult journey to Israel and the shock they experienced on their arrival, both in the face of the harsh conditions of life and the dismissive attitude of the Israeli authorities. Talking about their attempt to escape from Agur, Nizri tells:

They purposely brought us here at night...They knew that if we come in the daytime we wouldn't want to live here and we'd get back on the truck. They fooled us...when we came there were problems, there were thieves, Palestinian guerrilla fighters. There was no food, no shops, no teachers. So we rented some trucks, loaded them with all our stuff and ran away. We broke into Zarnuga, a settlement near Rehovot. We squatted in houses there, nice Swedish pretty buildings. We broke in and that night the police came, they dragged us out, beat us up and brought us back here, back to Ajur.

While farming was a central ideal of Zionist ideology, within the construct of Euro-modernity there existed a rigid dichotomy between 'modern' Jewish farming and 'backward and traditional' Arab villages, which manifested not only on the discursive level but also in the spatial design and management of Jewish agricultural settlements (the Moshavim and the Kibbutzim). The Mizrahi newcomers did not fit the Zionist ideal of modern European farming (Efrat, 2004). The Israeli authorities often viewed them as a 'problematic' population suffering from lack of education and in-need of modernisation. In contrast to this narrative, the elders of Agur stress that, coming from cities and a middle class background, they in fact had little interest in farming. For example, Haim who came from Turkey explained: "We are Documanchi, which means weavers, my dad was a weaver. The Jewish Agency forced us to be farmers".

Moreover, the terminology the elders use betrays the level of alienation they feel from the Zionist enterprise. The Zionist authorities are talked about in the third person, referred to constantly as 'they'.²⁰⁶ Set against an Israeli discourse in which the collective-self, and its linguistic construction 'we', is so prominent, the use of 'they' in reference to the Zionist authorities is poignantly telling. If part of the ambition of the Zionist enterprise was to ensure that the newcomers assimilate into an Israeli collective and internalize the Zionist discourse, then the way the elders tell their story offers a striking reminder of just how alienated the Arab Jews still feel within the Zionist state.

²⁰⁶ The elderly repeatedly construct sentences like "Messengers came and told us that we have to leave to Israel" or "first *they* took us to a place called Ranyiah... and then *they* took us to Baghdad..." or "*they* told us it was a Jewish state, Iraq is not our state. *They* said all Jews must live in one country".

The failure of Zionism to assimilate the elders into an imagined modern Jewish-European space also transpires in the contemporary state of Agur. The idealised dream of an ordered, planned and well- managed place has not materialised. Over the years, on-going state-imposed policies and internal rivalries have plunged Agur into a state of deprivation and decay. The community of the Moshav is mired in a long-lasting and bitter struggle between two extended families: the Jamos and the Ashkenazi-Dacomanchis and the cooperative's struggle for economic survival, rife with internal politics and in conflict with the State, is as a result severely impeded.

In giving voice to these stories *Cut* joins the growing critique of Zionism and its Orientalist perspective, which is also seen in recent Israeli cinema. Moreover, as with the films I discuss earlier, *Cut's* portrayal of Agur exposes its Arabness. What unfolds in the film emphasises how despite an oppressive Zionist mechanism, Arab culture and Arabic still define life in Agur; Arab music is played throughout the film and the protagonists' values, social norms and attitudes, the film subtly suggests, have more in common with the Arab societies they came from than with the hegemonic culture of European Jewry. The elders of the *Moshav*, whose mother tongue is Arabic, still refer to the Moshav by its Arab name, Ajur. As Yekheskel explains: "the Arab village that was here was Ajur, when we came the Jewish Agency told us to call it Agur. But Ajur is easier for us to say, so we left it as that".

However, as Shohat (2006) argues, while the Israeli post-Zionist critique attacks Euro-Zionist policies of discrimination and suppression of the Mizrahim, much of it keeps naturalizing the place of the Arab Jew within Jewish nationalism. Here, the gaze of the Palestinian filmmaker upon an Arab-Jewish place further 'problematizes' this critique. While the film is ostensibly about Agur, aiming to tell the story of internal struggles in the Moshav, in the face of repressive state policies and administration, odd references to the Arab village of Ajur pop up during the film, seemingly causing it to deviate from its narrative. The film's title *Cut* alludes to these interruptions, as the film's narrative is being disrupted at several points with the insertion of an image of a clapperboard 'cutting' its duration. In those scenes Hassan and his crew are seen 'negotiating' the

terms and subject matter of the film with the protagonists, as some of them refuse to be interviewed. This, we learn later, is due to their suspicions that Hassan is really attempting to make a 'political film' about the destroyed Arab village. These suspicions consume mainly the younger residents of the Moshav who avoid Hassan, the elders are less disturbed by the matter. As Yekhezkel, one of the elders of the Moshav, explains to Hassan, after the film has been 'cut' yet again, "they say you want to make a nationalist Arab film about us sitting on Arab land, and I said: what Idiot doesn't know that we sit on the lands of Arabs?"



Nassar and his crew forced to stop filming in *Cut*

Similar suspicions were raised on an extra-diagetic level, during the production of the film. A group of anxious *Moshav* residents contacted the local newspaper claiming that the filmmaker deceived them, pretending to make a film about the *Moshav* and actually seeking to make a "political film". In response, the New Foundation corresponded with Hassan and asked to see rushes of the film. Reassured it then published a declaration that the film is 'not political' but social.

Thus, *Cut* challenges the dichotomy between modern Jews and traditional Arabs, and at the same time 'de-naturalizes' the place of the Arab Jews within the Israeli national collective. The film's complex critique draws attention to the different relationship to

place amongst Palestinians and Israelis. The Zionist Utopian model that puts great emphasis on redemption of the land by means of imposed planning and organisation, which ultimately breaks down in the face of the *real* place, is implicitly set against the organic relationship of the Palestinian farmers to the land, which is evoked in the phantom of the Arab village Ajur.

By exposing the Arabness of the Jewish space, and the ambivalent relationships this constitutes with the Palestinians, Hassan evokes Agur as a 'third space', which reveals what Shohat (2006) has theorised as "occupying the actantial slot of both dominated and dominators, simultaneously disempowered as "Orientals" or "blacks" vis-a-vis "white" Euro-Israelis and empowered as Jews in a Jewish state vis-à-vis Palestinians (332).

Conclusion

If Palestinian films have often contested Zionist control over space and its representation by reinscribing a unified and symbolic Palestinian space, which transcends the geopolitical situation and materiality of contemporary Palestinian spaces in Israel, the films discussed here, did not replace one spatial imaginary with another.²⁰⁷ Rather, corresponding with Zionism's practices of 'creative destruction', they place their focus on liminal spaces and portray concrete places in all their contradictions and multi-inhabitations. These films offer a critical perspective, which moves beyond the binarisms of national discourses.

In depicting contemporary Palestinian (and Arab) spaces in Israel, the films I discuss in this chapter, as well as other examples that for the sake of brevity I did not discuss, destabilise the Zionist spatial imaginary of a modern and Jewish space.²⁰⁸ Their focus on

²⁰⁷ Such as in the films *Legend*, *1948*, *Keys* and *Wedding in the Galilee*.

²⁰⁸ I did not discuss Suha Arraf's films *Hard Ball* (2006) and *Good Morning Jerusalem* (2004), which similarly engage with depravation, discrimination and the marginality of the Palestinian space. In *Hard Ball* Arraf focuses on the town Sakhnin in the Galilee. The local football team won Israel's national cup in 2004, against all odds. Arraf's film explores the impact of the event on the townspeople and follows their

the local is a reflection of the diminishing Palestinian space in the face of Israeli expansionism, and of the reality of Israeli control, which segregated populations, divided space and created Arab ghettos. At the same time, by insisting on the local as the site of the films, the films challenge national imaginaries of a united and ethnically monolithic space. By breaking up the united national space, and portraying concrete places, in all their fragmented and complicated situations, they allow the nuances and differences between specific places across Israel/Palestine to surface. By portraying decay, stagnation and dysfunction of the Palestinian places within Israel these films reflect on an ongoing processes of marginalisation, deprivation and discrimination. At the same time, in the face of the Orientalist discourse of modernization which emphasises planning, development and structure, highlighting disorder and fragmentation can be seen as a form of subversion that problematises the Zionist fantasy of an ordered Euro-modern space. Finally, they engage with the Israeli imaginary, and with Orientalist and neo-Orientalist discourses and practices in Israel, which in rejecting the Arabness of the land exclude not only the Palestinians but also the Arab Jews. Exposing the ambivalence, which is intrinsic to the Zionist relationship to the 'place' of Israel, some of these films create alternative spaces of co-habitation.

In different ways all these films highlight liminality, they position their characters and construct spaces in the intersections between languages and cultures. They allow hybridities, contradictions and ambivalence to come to the surface and creatively create 'third spaces' that entertain alternatives and transgress national binarism. This is seen in the Jerusalem under the control of Ad'an in *Chronicle*, or the Jerusalem that exists in Joseph's room in *Sense of Need*, in the movement of Binj in the space of Tel-Aviv-Jaffa in *Ajami* and in the Jewish-Arab space that is marked in the Jaffa of *Port of Memory* and the Agur of *Cut*. In some ways, the transgressions suggested in these films are reflections of the unique situation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which unlike the Palestinians in

efforts to maintain this achievement by building a proper stadium. The story unfolds cultural and national conflicts and teases out, as in other films I discuss, questions of belonging. *Good Morning Jerusalem* portrays the desperation and depravation of several families in East Jerusalem, whose undefined status (not being Israeli citizens on the one hand but not belonging to the PA on the other) deprive them of basic human rights. Similar issues in East Jerusalem are dealt with in Abu-Wael's *Waiting for Salah a-Din* which I mentioned in footnote 103. On the film's depiction of space see Gertz and Khliefi, 2008 pp. 155-8.

the PA, or in some cases in exile, are able to move relatively freely across the material borders and the imaginary boundaries of culture and languages. However, while conditions of hybridities are exposed, while identities are worked out in liminal spaces between cultures, ethnicities and religions, and while alternative processes of identification are offered in 'third spaces', these are far from being celebratory (or optimistic) in ways that such transgression is often treated in the West. While these films did not necessarily produce a national essence, the moments of transgression they offer are temporary and difficult. In the on-going context of the conflict they appear as signs of ambivalence and at times those of despair.

Chapter 6

Crossing the Green Line: Palestinian-Israeli filmmakers and the *Intifada*

As noted in the introduction, if the films that were made by the PLO film units documented the armed struggle, partly as a mobilizing strategy, New Palestinian Cinema has, generally speaking, moved away from such documentary depictions. Within that, in Palestinian films that were produced inside Israel, or by Palestinian citizens of Israel, the armed struggle has usually been evoked more abstractly by positioning it in relation to, or in opposition to, other strategies of resistance such as the *Summud*.

For example, in *Wedding in the Galilee* the armed struggle is featured as an option of resistance that the narrative of the film eventually discounts in favour of other forms of resistance. Although the ambiguous final image of *Wedding in the Galilee* - a child taking shelter from the Israeli gunfire - has often been interpreted as anticipating the first *Intifada*, (Gertz and Khleifi, 2006: 84; Shafik, 2001), in the film's narrative the *Shabab*, who contemplate an act of armed resistance against the Israeli Military governor, fail and resistance is articulated through the subversive 'third space' created by the women, and by the silence of the older generation, who are rooted in their land (Gertz and Khleifi, 2006; Shohat, 1988; Ball, 2008). In *In the Ninth Month* the plot revolves around the relationship between two brothers, one who joined the armed resistance, and thus moved across the border of Israel, to Lebanon, and the other that remained in the village in the Galilee. Through the relationship between the brothers, and their meetings on the liminal space of the border, Nassar explores the relationship between the Palestinians who are inside Israel and those in exile, those who fight by armed resistance and those who fight through the *Summud*. This film, ultimately, claim Gertz and Khleifi (2006), restores the national unity (118-119).

As I have already noted in the previous chapters, in *Legend* Hassan explores the relationship between the *Summud* and the armed struggle, in the juxtaposition of Salim, who is in Nazareth, and Mahmood who joined the PLO. In Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* the director marks the space of Palestinians inside Israel, as private and

stagnated, while the space beyond the Green Line, (and the liminal space of East Jerusalem), are the spaces where political resistance occurs. In his next film, *Divine Intervention*, Suleiman simultaneously uses and subverts popular symbols of armed resistance, such as the *fida'i* (the freedom fighter) and the throwing of the stone (associated with resistance in the first *Intifada*) (Salti, 2010; Ball, 2008).²⁰⁹ In Zoabi's *Be Quiet*, the boy aiming the stone at his father evokes the popular image of the *Shabab* throwing the stones in the first *Intifada*.

This chapter is concerned with three films, that were made during the time of *Al Aksa Intifada* and whose central topic is the armed struggle across the Green Line. Unlike the examples mentioned above, these films have documented concrete and contemporary acts of armed resistance. As I have indicated briefly in chapter two, the escalating violence since the outbreak of the *Al-Aksa* Intifada prompted some Palestinian filmmakers in Israel not only to concentrate on the Palestinian situation across the Green Line (in the PA), but also to tackle the armed struggle directly. This was perhaps most visible during the surge of violence in April 2002, when three Palestinian-Israeli filmmakers made films about the 'Battle of Jenin'. These films, *Jenin, Jenin* (Mohammad Bakri, 2002), *Invasion (Ijtiyah)*, Nizar Hassan, 2003) and *Arna's Children (Awlad Arna)*, Juliano Mer-Hamis, 2003) are the focus of this chapter. I suggest that, despite their small number, these films are worthy of detailed consideration.

Other scholars have written about these films, albeit not together and with a different focus in mind. Haim Bresheeth (2006) discusses *Jenin, Jenin* and *Invasion* in relation to the representation of the *Nakba*, an argument that I will elaborate on shortly, as it is relevant to my discussion. Gertz and Khleifi have written briefly about *Arna's Children* in the epilogue of their books (2006, 2008), pointing to the film's uniqueness and importance. According to Gertz and Khleifi, the film is unique for showing Jews and Arabs in separation and the relationship between them, and in projecting an image of a

²⁰⁹ For a detailed discussion of the development of Palestinian symbols of resistance as well as their treatment in *Divine Intervention*, see: Salti, 2010.

future which “does not appear to counter hopes and dreams, as in other films” (2008: 196).

Expanding on this analysis, I consider the three films together in relation to the focus of this thesis. I examine the films as counter-representations of the events in Jenin, which share a similar context of production, and as interventions within the Israeli public sphere. Theoretically, since these documentaries deal with current affairs in a manner that resembles video activism, and because of the resulting controversy triggered inside Israel, I consider them in relation to tensions intrinsic to the documentary genre. Beyond this, I examine the ways in which these films reflect and articulate forms of resistance (*Summud* and/or the armed struggle) from the particular position of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Visible Evidence: Representing ‘the Battle of Jenin’

The context of production of *Jenin, Jenin, Invasion* and *Arna’s Children* is atypical of the Palestinian films produced in Israel thus far. Rather than following the modes of subjective documentaries, or experimental and independent fictions, whose focus is small stories of everyday life, the mode of production of these films resonates more with video activism and investigative journalism, primarily since they addressed then current events within the conflict zone. Consequently, these films resemble many of the films that are produced in the PA, which, as Dickinson (2005) observed, often use direct documentary modes of address to bring ‘evidence’ of Israeli acts of aggression and violation of human rights.

In spring 2002 the Israeli army launched operation ‘Defensive Shield’ in the West Bank while invading several towns under the control of the PA. In the Jenin refugee camp the army encountered armed resistance from the residents, which developed into a 14-day battle that later acquired the name ‘The Battle of Jenin’. Throughout the 14 days of fighting the IDF enforced a cordon around the camp and media access was prevented. This caused a frenzy of media speculation about what was happening inside the camp.

When the Israeli forces withdrew when the battle ended conflicting accounts of the events, especially regarding the number of Palestinian casualties and the extent of the demolition, were reported by the Israeli, Palestinian and international media.²¹⁰

The 'discursive battle' in world (and local) media over the representation of what happened in Jenin is no less significant than the actual event (as is often the case with the intense media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) for it exposed, yet again, the processes that are in operation in the construction of national narratives and collective memories. The three films I discuss here were produced amidst an influx of Israeli and international reporters and filmmakers who swamped the camp seeking 'the real story'. The accounts of the filmmakers about the films' production reflect this atmosphere.

According to Nizar Hassan, he formed the idea of making the film in the first few days of the operation. From his home in Mashad, a village near Nazareth, Hassan could see the IDF helicopters making their way to the West Bank. In an interview with *Haaretz*, the Israeli newspaper, he explained: "Palestinians also have fears, even if they are called Israeli citizens. Sometimes those fears are not realistic, and I know they are not realistic, but during those nights I kept thinking that those helicopters would descend on Nazareth too".²¹¹

Following the reports in the media closely in the next few days, Hassan slowly came to realise that in Jenin, as he puts it, "an heroic Palestinian battle takes place".²¹² Discussing

²¹⁰Palestinian sources suggested a massacre has taken place, claiming that about five hundred people had been killed, bodies had been buried alive under the rubble and several hundred more were injured. Israel denied the accusation of massacre, claiming that it was a battle between armed forces and while some civilians may have been caught in the crossfire, this could not have been prevented in a combat situation. For several weeks following the events, international experts, NGOs, and a UN fact-finding mission were engaged with collecting evidence and testimonies in an attempt to construct a reliable account of the battle. The claims of massacre were eventually disputed. Instead, it was established that 53 Palestinians died, almost half of them civilians, and 23 Israeli soldiers were killed. Severe damage was caused to Palestinian property. Buildings were bulldozed and flattened. 200 homes were demolished entirely and 300 more became unsuitable for habitation.

²¹¹Aviv Lavie (25.4.2003) *Ha'aretz*.

²¹² *Ibid*.

the issue with the producer Ra'ed Andoni, a colleague and friend, who was then under curfew in his home town of Bethlehem (in the PA), the idea to make a film about the battle crystallised. When Hassan was contacted a few days later by a Swedish broadcaster who offered a small commission for a film about the events in Jenin, the two decided to start working. Hassan entered the camp, escorted by locals, even before the IDF troops had pulled out. As Hassan described it to the Israeli reporter:

They took us in through a side road, it was scary as hell. We walked for seven hours through fields to get into the camp. I didn't take the camera, I just wanted to feel the layout of things. The second time I went in it was with a camera, it was the day after the army retreated and took up position on the hills. As far as I know I was the first filmmaker in the camp after the fighting.²¹³

Mohammad Bakri was performing in a theatre in Haifa when the news about a battle in Jenin was received. After the show Bakri and a Jewish Israeli colleague drove to the Jenin checkpoint to join a demonstration against the invasion of the Israeli troops. According to Bakri, one of the IDF soldiers at the checkpoint, "a settler-solider" as he emphasised, shot at the demonstrators and his friend was injured. "At that moment", he says, "I realised that things had gone too far and decided to go in. I decided that this was the time to make use of my Israeli ID and to go in with a camera. In the next ten days I arranged the equipment and entered immediately when the army left".²¹⁴ Bakri too sneaked into the camp through the hills assisted by locals, who are experienced in crossing the Green Line and bypassing Israeli blockades.

Unlike Hassan and Bakri, Juliano Mer-Hamis did not set out to make a film about the battle. Rather, the events that led to the battle occurred while he was making a different film in Jenin, about Arna, his mother, a Jewish leftist activist, and her voluntary political work in the camp.²¹⁵ The film has a complicated production history stretching over a period of several years. During the first Intifada, in 1987, Arna established a theatre and an art centre for children in the Jenin refugee camp. Mer-Hamis joined her as the

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Mohammad Bakri, interview, Tel Aviv, 13.9.04.

²¹⁵ As mentioned in chapter, Mer Hamis comes from a family of mix-marriage. See page 88.

theatre's director, and documented on video the work of the theatre for several years. In 1994, when Arna was diagnosed with cancer, Mer-Hamis, together with the Tel Aviv-based producer Osnat Trabelsi, secured the support of the Israeli New Foundation for Cinema and Television to produce a documentary about Arna and her political work in Jenin. In the original treatment Arna, and her relationship with her son, were the center of the film. As Mer-Hamis presented it in the original treatment:

Arna embodies the torn and multifaced history of Israel itself... [and] the film will tell Arna's story not as a public figure but as a wife and a mother. Told from her son, the director's, point of view the film will probe her to address the tensions between her public life and her private one and discuss her relationship with her family.²¹⁶

However, the film was not completed. In 1996, after many complications, and a few days before Arna's death, Mer-Hamis stopped filming. In a letter to the film foundation he explained that he cannot finish the project due to his own emotional difficulties with the subject and his inability to come up with a "satisfactory story in terms of the content or the cinematic approach".²¹⁷ In a later interview with the Israeli newspaper *Globes* in 2004 Mer Hamis said: "I felt I couldn't detach myself emotionally and that I couldn't edit the film according to my mother's wishes. She insisted that the film would not be a commemoration film about her, but about the political issues".²¹⁸

A few years later, in 2000, Mer-Hamis saw on television that one of the theatre's children, Yousef Sweti, had carried out a suicide attack in the Israeli town of Hedera. Mer-Hamis decided to return to the film, this time focusing on the group of children he documented during the first Intifada, when the theatre was active. The new treatment for the film set out to search for the children, now adults, and to follow their increasing involvement in the armed resistance being organized in the camp. Filming started in 2001. Like Hassan

²¹⁶ In one of the (imagined) scenes in the treatment Juliano and Arna are sitting in a closed room together, when Juliano finally asks "have you ever thought about the consequences of what you are doing, about the children you are bringing into the world, about the torn existence that they will have? Arna in this imagined scene tells Mer-Hamis she was too young and too careless to consider the effects her mixed marriage will have on her children. Access to the original treatment was provided by the New Foundation for Cinema and Television.

²¹⁷ In the film's production file. Access provided by the New Foundation for Cinema and Television.

²¹⁸ Libsker, Ari (5.4.2004) *Globes*.

and Bakri, Mer-Hamis's account of the film's production emphasized the act of crossing the border:

It was very difficult to get into Jenin. I bypassed the checkpoints through all sorts of back roads and then a few guys from Jenin spotted me and attacked me. Luckily someone had recognized me. It was Ala Al Sba'a one of the theatre group children who has since become a leader of one of the Al-Aksa Troop units. I joined them and followed them with a camera for six months. I then went back to Tel-Aviv to edit the film as the military operation Defense Shield started. I managed to get back in again on the last days of the fighting and stayed there for another two months.²¹⁹

Thus, as the production stories demonstrate, in the heated political atmosphere and the uncertainty surrounding the events, the initial motivation of all the filmmakers was to provide 'visible evidence' of the events from a Palestinian perspective. The filmmakers pointed their cameras at the ruins and the rubble, and their microphones at the residents of the camp, to provide visual and oral *testimony* of the events. While the three films are very different, they all contain interviews with the residents and share similar imagery of the camp after the battle: the bleak, almost lunar landscape created by the bulldozed houses, children playing amongst the rubble, spent ammunition, graffiti written by the Israeli soldiers, and the rotting remains of IDF field rations.

The actuality of the events and the immediacy with which the films were produced invited a reading of the films on this indexical level. In the context of the 'discursive battle' between Israel and Palestine after the event, these Palestinian films functioned as instances of counter-representations. In the face of the Israeli control over the possibility of media coverage they rendered the Palestinian experience visible. The reception of the films (especially in Israel) brought to the foreground a tension between the objective and the subjective which is intrinsic to the documentary genre, especially in instances where documentaries are made in the midst of, and in relation to, contemporary political conflicts.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Although much of documentary practice has shifted in recent years towards personal and individual narratives, and contemporary documentary theory stresses the subjectivity and relativity of the documentary text (Nichols 2001; Renov 2004; Bruzzi, 2000; Ginsburg 2002), as Michael Chanan (2007) argues, “to discount the automatic function of the camera altogether and emphasise only the subjective part...is to fall into an error” (4). The documentary text constitutes a complex relationship between the objective and the subjective: the photographic image is “both index and icon at the same time” (ibid.). Indeed, as the case of the three Jenin films demonstrates, despite the shifts in documentary practice and theory, public debates about the documentaries still revealed a set of generic expectations from documentaries to make “truthful” or “objective” claims about the historical world.

In Israel, where I studied the films’ reception more closely, discussion of the films was largely reduced to the question of the alleged massacre, especially in the case of *Jenin Jenin*. Premiering in the Tel Aviv Cinemateque in October 2002, only a few months after the events, the film stirred up a heated public debate and, as I mentioned in chapter two, was censored shortly afterwards.²²⁰ The film was accused in public debates, as well as by the Board of Censors, of being untrue (by alleging a massacre) and unbalanced, by failing to represent the IDF’s side of the story. Zvi Barel’s article in the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz* reflects the spirit of the debate. Barel opened his article by stating that he has not seen the film and has no intention of doing so, exemplifying the extent to which the film was judged only an indexical level and only in the context of the conflicting Israeli and Palestinian narratives. Barel writes:

My truth is safe. I can imagine that Bakri’s truth will not undermine the truth of most of the Jewish people of Israel who do not define the events in Jenin as ‘a massacre’. And if there was no massacre, there isn’t a story, let alone a film, certainly not the need for a documentary. Stories just about Palestinians being killed can be read in the newspapers.²²¹

²²⁰ In this screening a vociferous group of bereaved parents accused Bakri of slandering the dead soldiers and sued him for libel. This brought the film to the public’s eye and for many months demonstrations were held for and against the film.

²²¹ Zvi Barel, (15.12.2002) *Ha’aretz*.

Seeking to overrule the censor's decision, Bakri and the Israeli Documentary Filmmakers Forum appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court. The appeal did not tackle the content of the film but rather argued that the censors had based their decision on a misleading understanding of the documentary genre. Indeed, a substantial part of the debate in court was not devoted to the content of the film itself but to the blurred boundaries of the documentary genre and the question of whether documentary films reference historical truth or the artistic vision of the director.²²²

Bakri won his appeal two years later, and the ban was lifted, but *Jenin, Jenin* was inscribed in the public opinion in Israel as a false (Palestinian) propaganda film. Despite his continuous efforts, Bakri failed to distribute and exhibit the film in Israel. European broadcasters such as ARTE and the British Channel 4 also rejected the film. Yet, the film was screened in several international film festivals and in numerous pro-Palestinian political events around the world. Furthermore, as I mentioned in chapter two, the affair had serious ramifications for Bakri's career inside Israel (as he was exposed to personal and professional harassment) but contributed to positioning Bakri as a leading activist filmmaker outside of Israel.²²³

According to Bakri, this turn of events was highly undesirable. In an interview he said that his primary target audience was the Israeli public, particularly Jews, and that the reactions to the film in Israel took him by complete surprise. Bakri said: "when I finished filming I rushed to Rome to edit the film, I was sure I was going to get a prize for it in Israel. I wanted to show the Israeli public what I have seen, the common people, their thoughts and feelings. I didn't intend to manipulate or distort anything, or to make claims about the soldiers".²²⁴ In a sequel documentary *Since You Left* (2005) Bakri revisits the affair, mourning the possibility of assimilation into Israeli society.²²⁵ The film is structured around imaginary conversations of the director with the late Emile

²²² The appeal argued that a documentary film is a form of artistic expression, which should not be subjected to the same ethical requirements as journalism.

²²³ Mohammad Bakri, interview, Tel Aviv, 13.9.04.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ *Since You Left* was partly funded by the New Foundation for Cinema and Television and was screened in Tel Aviv Cinemateque as well as in television Channel 8 of the Cables.

Habibi, his mentor, and includes a chronicle of Bakri's struggle against the censor and against Israeli public opinion. What transpired in this film was perhaps best encapsulated in one significant scene where Bakri's lawyer, Avigdor Feldman, says to him: "most people that I have represented in cases like this take some sort of pride in the fact that they were censored. You never did. You were really insulted".

Invasion and *Arna's Children* were released about a year after the event, when the UN fact-finding mission had already submitted its report and the controversy over the scale of the operation had been resolved. *Arna's Children*, which was aired on Israeli television a number of times, on the whole, did not trigger much controversy. *Invasion's* primary audience, according to Hassan, were Palestinians.²²⁶ The film's premiere was organised by Hassan, as a simultaneous screening in Nazareth and Beirut, both for Palestinian audiences. The two separate sites were linked by video. This was a significant event for Hassan, as he explained in several interviews, as it brought together the two Palestinian communities.²²⁷ The film was aired twice on channel 8, the Cable documentary channel. It was screened in the film festival organised by Spair college, where Hassan teaches, in Sderot in southern Israel, and in a number of political events organised by Israeli leftist activists. It was also screened in the refugee camp itself, with improvised means, in the area that was bulldozed by the Israeli army.²²⁸

Generally speaking, reviews in the Israeli media kept echoing the question of the alleged massacre and in interviews the filmmakers were asked about their position on the matter time and again. While these films have not triggered the same level of public controversy as *Jenin, Jenin*, they too were regarded, at least in Israel, primarily in terms of their indexical value. From such a perspective, *Invasion* was seen as a more balanced film, compared with *Jenin, Jenin*, because it includes an interview with an Israeli soldier who participated in the operation. *Arna's Children* was read primarily in relation to the

²²⁶ For example, in interview with Aviv Lavie in Ha'aretz Hassan said: "...I am not looking for film to be well received in Israel, if this was I wanted I had start thinking how the Israelis see things, and this time I wanted to speak to myself, to my people...I understand and identify with the Palestinian point of view and I don't hide it". 24.04.2003.

²²⁷ See: *ibid.*; Rees, Matt (18.5. 2003) *Time Europe Magazine*.

²²⁸ For a full report of the screening in Jenin see Serna, Yigal (01.08.2003) *Yediot Ahronot*.

footage of the troops still in fighting, which seemed to support the Israeli claim that this was a risky combat situation, rather than a mission which targeted innocent civilians.

Transcending actuality: the Jenin films as 'works of mourning'

Beyond the films' function as counter-representation that provides an account of what happened in Jenin, I suggest a more multi-layered reading. While these films mark an instance of video activism, providing an account from the margins that stands against the Israeli media campaign, it is important to note that they also address an internal Palestinian discourse. The visible evidence of the camp in ruins, and the oral testimonies of the residents, are organised in ways that transcend the actuality of the events in Jenin and reveal deeper meanings. The three films engage, in different ways, with the incorporation of the battle into the evolving Palestinian national narrative, positioning it on a national timeline and in relation to the Palestinian national ethos of resistance. As 'sites' through which historical narratives and collective memory are constructed, these films are "works of mourning", which, as Michael Renov suggests, "are always also and maybe mainly a performance of self-inscription" (2004: 120).

Both *Jenin, Jenin* and *Invasion* seemingly present a tapestry of testimonies of the events in Jenin in 2002, but the different editing and interviewing strategies adopted by the directors 'displace' the events from their concrete political context - Jenin in 2002 - and place them within an abstract and mythical timeframe and landscape. Here also the tendency of Palestinian films to represent the traumatic event of the Nakba in different disguises in the filmic present, which I discussed in chapter three, is revealed.

In *Jenin, Jenin* the structure of the film presents the collage of voices and images from the camp in a style which eludes coherent narrative, and which goes against conventions of factual representation in 'investigative documentaries'. No contextual information is given by the narration, or other rhetorical devices. The different testimonies and sources are unverified and at times the film even presents contradictory accounts. The editing technique resembles a "mosaic", to use Bill Nichols

term, rather than being based on a chronological or causal principle of organization. In such films, says Nichols (1985) “sequences follow each other consecutively but without a clearly marked temporal relationship. Lacking narrative structure, such films also lack “this kind of linear-causality explanation of events” (121). The structure of the film also eludes a coherent cinematic space. There is no use of establishing shots, a conventional technique of documentary films, and there are only a few long shots. Instead, fragmented cropped and repetitive images of ruins and destruction appear, dislocated from their concrete spatial context.

The testimonies of the protagonists in *Jenin, Jenin* are also taken away from their concrete biographical context. Apart from in one incident, the names and other biographical identifiers of the protagonists are not revealed. The anonymity of the protagonists, and the stripping of their biographical context, cast them in their symbolic role, as representing an entire Palestinian entity.

As Bresheeth (2006, 2007) argued in relation to *Jenin, Jenin* as well as to other films I discussed previously, the fragmented structure of the film resonates with a traumatic ‘structure of experience’. The mosaic editing technique, preventing an assimilation of the testimonies into a coherent chain of events, excessive repetition of literal images and editing which makes it difficult to assimilate these images into a unified cinematic space, all evoke a traumatic structure of experience on a visual level. The protagonists’ testimonies, stripped of their concrete context, echo symbolically a perpetual traumatic experience of the Palestinian people.

In *Invasion* Hassan evokes the memory of the *Nakba* more directly. He establishes the link between Jenin 2002 and the original catastrophe of 1948 in the beginning of the film, when a caption reminds us that: “The camp’s residents are refugees who were expelled from 56 Palestinian villages which became a part of the State of Israel”. Further into the film Hassan evokes this link when he probes his interviewees repeatedly to step outside the concrete realities of the contemporary events and refer back to the events

surrounding the *Nakba*, asking them to account for their strategies of coping; did they leave or did they stay?



The protagonist talking about their coping strategies in *Invasion*

For example, in an interview with Rida Hamdan and his elderly mother, Hamdan is seen standing against the bare wall of his semi-demolished, deserted house and says: “my name is Rida Hamdan. When I heard an invasion was taking place I left the house”. After Hamdan’s short description of leaving, the following dialogue takes place:

Hassan: why did you leave the house?

Hamdan: I have small children and I was afraid of the soldiers... they will arrest anyone...this old woman is my mother

Hassan: (to the mother) what did you do this time?

The mother: this time I didn’t stay at home... it reminded me of when we fled from Zeri’n. we didn’t take anything with us. We just left. We fled to several places... in the end we came back here and we settled in Jenin. Since 48 ever since I can remember I haven’t had one good day.

Similarly, at the end of a long interview with Ali Yosuf Faied about the circumstances of his injury during the invasion, Hassan's leading questions in the following dialogue compel Ali to re-articulate the geo- political map of Palestine/Israel.

Hassan: where are you from? where do you live?

Ali: (slightly bewildered) "in the camp"

Hassan: "which camp?"

Ali: "Jenin"

The scene cuts to an image of Ali's house which has been heavily damaged in the invasion. In the far corner of the darkened frame we see a candle flame. The camera zooms in and Hebrew graffiti on the wall is revealed quoting a verse of a popular Israeli song: "I have no other land, even if my land is on fire". Ali's voice comes over the image and the shot dissolves back to the interview setting in the hospital.

Ali: "I was born in Zer'in and grew up in Haifa"

Hassan: "where is Zer'in?"

Ali: here. (points out the direction) "just 18 km from here"

Hassan: "where is it exactly?"

Ali: "Do you know Sanda'le?"

Hassan: "I do. But where is it now?"

Ali pauses, laughs a little and then reply "it's in Israel"

The interview ends.

Hassan insists in this dialogue on drawing our attention to what Ali, and the viewers, know all too well: that Ali, like many others, found himself in Jenin as a refugee. But Ali and others have managed to build new houses, plant trees and made new homes for themselves, even in a refugee camp. By insisting on the act of renaming Ali's original home, Hassan de-neutralises and de-trivialises the geo-political order of the post-1967 map and challenges any acceptance of it.

In *Arna's Children* the film's unique materials and its subjective perspective transcend the event of 2002 by virtue of the historical perspective they provide, not by means of evoking an abstract mythical time and space. Equally, the film's 'work of mourning' is

not manifested in reconstituting the *Nakba*'s traumatic structure of experience but is revealed in the centrality of mourning to the film's narrative.

The different stages of the film's production - which were described in the previous section - constitute the narrative of the film. Narrated by Mer-Hamis the film leads us through life in the Jenin refugee camp from the time of the first *Intifada* when the theatre was operating in the camp, to the present time during the second Intifada. Structurally, the film contains of two parts. The first part consists mainly of the footage that Mer-Hamis shot for the original film, when Arna was still alive, the theatre was operating, and the main protagonists - Nidal, Yousef, Ashraf, Majdi, Ala and Mahmood - were children. The death of Arna marks the end of this part, as we see the director collecting her body from the morgue. The second part starts in April 2002, when the director re-enters the camp in the aftermath of the battle, looking to establish what had happen to the theatre and to the children, who had by now grown up. It ends with the killing of Ala by Israeli forces a few weeks after the battle was officially over.

It is the subjective point of view of the film that constitutes its temporal axis and its spatial imagery. The Battle of Jenin in 2002 exists in a concrete temporal continuum – stretching between the two *Intifadas* - and is embedded in the protagonists' personal lives. Similarly, the visual representation of space - the camp, the ruins, the bodies and graves and the other identifiers of the battle - derive from the protagonists' personal world. We see the demolished theatre, for example, or the camp through the lens of a hand held camera that follows the director into the protagonists' private spaces. In contrast to *Jenin, Jenin* and *Invasion*, in *Arna's Children* the Battle of Jenin is represented in relation to the concrete political circumstances and placed within a wider historical context, and its indexical images of a camp in ruins are embodied in specific subjectivities.

The film's back and forth movement from documentary footage of the children in the early 1990s, to the contemporary reality of the young men in Jenin in 2002, creates a timeline, which, beyond its subjective relevance to the life of its protagonists, illustrates

the escalation of the conflict and draws historical connections between the actions of the Israeli machinery of occupation in the past and the scale and extent of the Palestinian armed struggle today. Mer-Hamis makes these connections explicit. While the film constitutes a concrete temporal continuum, the events are not delivered chronologically. Creating suspense, Mer-Hamis the narrator inserts into the first part of the film, when the children are young and the theatre is operating, preliminary information regarding the future destiny of the children.

For example, in a scene shot following the demolition of Ala's house during the first *Intifada* we see Arna running an art therapy session with the children, encouraging them to express their anger, frustration and fear. Ala the child is seen painting a flag of Palestine. The film then cuts to Ala the man holding a gun, while Mer-Hamis's voiceover informs us: "In eight years time Ala will lead the *Al-Aqsa* troops into battle in the refugee camp of Jenin". The juxtaposition of the image of the child holding the paintbrush and the man holding the gun encapsulates the entire meaning of the film. Through it, Mer-Hamis spells out for the viewers the harsh realities of the escalation of the conflict and its causes, embodied in the concrete personal story of Ala.



Ala the child in the ruins of his demolished house in *Arna's Children*



Ala the man explaining Mer-Hamis the *Al-Aksa Troops* battle tactics in *Aran's Children*

Throughout the film mourning is a central topic: Ala the boy mourns his demolished home; the bereaved mothers of the protagonists mourn their sons; and, importantly, the director mourns his mother Arna. Ultimately, beyond the film's protagonists' personal mourning, the film mourns the possibility of peace gone astray between the two *Intifadas*. It mourns Aran's political activism, the hopes of the children and their parents that are shattered time and again in the face of the escalating violence.

Popular resistance and national heroes

In addition to transcending the actuality of 'the battle of Jenin' the three films function as sites through which the directors negotiate, in different ways, with the ethos of armed resistance. In *Invasion*, in addition to interviews with the residents, the film presents two main protagonists: a Palestinian resistance fighter and an Israeli soldier who took part in the military operation. Their narratives spread along the timeline, slotted between interviews with the residents and thereby creating a multi-vocal narrative which moves between three points of view: the victims', the fighters' and the

perpetrators'. The multiplicity of viewpoints and competing narratives, and the relationship that the film creates between the indexical imagery and these narratives reveal its self-reflexive approach. As with his other films, Hassan simultaneously reconstructs the mythical narrative and subverts it by challenging the conventions of representation, drawing our attention to the very act of storytelling.²²⁹

The Palestinian fighter in *Invasion* carries the film's main message. Hassan's clear motivation, as stated in the interview quoted above, was to make a film that would depict a *heroic* battle in Jenin, rather than merely portraying the victimized Palestinian population.²³⁰ The fighter, who we never *see* (presumably for security reasons), provides an eloquent and coherent account of the battle. While Hassan's interviewing technique throughout the film was probing, as he often pressed his interviewees to address particular points, and his editing often created suspense and gaps to achieve desired effects, the interview with the Palestinian fighter seems unaltered by Hassan.

The fighter articulates a message directed at an internal Palestinian debate regarding the armed struggle and its price - a debate that is rooted in the original trauma of the 1948 war and which has been perpetuated in the conflict between the generations ever since. It is in relation to the fighter's narrative of resistance that Hassan probes his interviewees to talk about their strategies for coping with the military invasion in 2002, repeatedly addressing one central question: did they leave their houses or did they stay? It is in direct reference to this internal debate that the fighter stresses the importance of the popular resistance, notwithstanding the heavy price that was paid. As he explains to Hassan at some point in the film: "The residents knew it's not going to be like it was in previous times. We knew to expect great destruction and the loss of

²²⁹ *Invasion* is divided into five episodes which poetic titles ('The Dream', 'The Passage', 'Love and Sail', 'The Guesthouse' and 'The Love Nest') are at odds with the seemingly factual motivation of the film and which principle of division is left ambiguous. The inclusion of these poetic elements seems to unsettle the possibility of reading the film simply as an investigative documentary work, seeking to reconstruct an objective account of the events.

²³⁰ See: Lavie, Aviv, (24.04.2003), *Ha'aretz*.

many lives. We knew that but we are not regretting it. We defended our homeland. We will not be the refugees of 2002”.

Thus, encapsulating the film’s central message, the fighter’s response reinforces the notion of the heroic fight and at the same time reconstitutes the analogy between 1948 and the incident in Jenin in 2002. In this way the film contributes to inscribing the events in Jenin as a formative event, rather than another point of escalating violence in a long and bitter succession of events oscillating between diplomacy and violence, that have characterised the Israeli-Palestinian relationship since the Oslo accord.

Yuval, the Israeli soldier who operated one of the D9 bulldozers used to demolish the houses, is interviewed in a cinema. Hassan shows Yuval recorded footage he shot in the camp, as well as footage of the battle taken by another Israeli soldier, a student of Hassan’s, and asks him to discuss them. In so doing, Hassan draws our attention to the very question of the validity of testimony, and of the testimony’s relation to the visible evidence.

The interview with Yuval opens the film and sets its reflexive mode. The film’s opening image shows a dirt road in the Jenin refugee camp as the camera follows two men walking along it. Then the frame opens gradually and we are made aware that this is, in fact, a recorded image of the road, which is projected onto a screen. A further opening of the frame reveals the cinema hall and Yuval watching the images. The camera then zooms out to reveal Hassan sitting behind Yuval watching him watching the images. The camera watches them both from behind. This succession of shots, a visual axis of gazes, draws our attention, firstly, to the distance between the actual event and its representation in Hassan’s film, thus constituting Hassan’s reflexive approach on the visual level. Secondly, the layout of the gazes constitutes the relationship of power between the director and the Israeli soldier. The questions of who watches whom and through which lens, thus become more acutely significant. This highlights the film’s self-awareness: what we see is a representation of the Israeli perspective of the events, from a Palestinian point of view.

Laconically, and in Hebrew, Hassan's questions to Yuval focus on the technical details of the operation. He asks exactly what kind of bulldozers were used. Which direction did the troops enter from? What were the communication procedures between the army units? What was the daily rate of destruction? and so on. The juxtaposition of these seemingly banal technical details with the stories of the camp's residents reinforces the sense of outrage. Our attention is also drawn to the workings of the occupation machinery and reminds us of what Hannah Arendt referred to as 'the banality of evil'.²³¹ As the film progresses Hassan moves from technical matters to asking Yuval to confront moral dilemmas, still in relation to the recorded footage, and finally he directly raises the question of possible refusal to serve in the army. The accumulative effect of the interview eventually trivializes Yuval's experiences. By cross-cutting Yuval's dry and technical responses with the camp residents' interviews, Hassan illuminates the imbalance of power inherent in the conflict (despite the fact that there had been a battle). Against the testimonies of the residents recounting the destruction and death, Yuval's moral dilemmas and political awareness acquire not only a banal status but also, and perhaps more importantly, an unworthy and petty awareness.

The image of the occupier reflected in Hassan's depiction of the Israeli soldier resonates with the representation of the Israeli Army that was seen in Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine* and in Shady Srur's *Sense of Need*. The Israeli soldier is not so much the powerful demon as a confused character lacking the moral conviction of his own actions, as if caught up in some bellicose machinery of occupation, which having lost its initial direction, is now driven solely by its own inertia. Compared with the Palestinian fighter that demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the overall organization of resistance during the days of the battle (the number of fighters, the dissemination of forces and the battle tactics of the Israeli army) the Israeli soldier mainly demonstrates confusion. Compared with the Palestinian fighter's message of unity and voluntary spirit (emphasizing that this was a popular resistance and a spontaneous coming together of

²³¹ Hassan is aware of this resonance; in an interview with Aviv Lavie he uses the term. See: Aviv Lavie, "The Truth about Jenin".

the residents across the political divide) the Israeli soldier lacks moral conviction. Ultimately, through the juxtaposition of the Israeli soldier and the Palestinian fighter, Hassan subverts the Zionist narrative: the popular resistance of the Palestinian assumes the higher moral ground.

If the Palestinian cinema in general is seen as a project of counter-representation seeking to give voice to a Palestinian narrative previously silenced by Zionism, then in *Invasion* Hassan not only reverses the gaze by self-representing the Palestinian point of view, but seeks further to subvert the power structure by pointing the camera at the oppressor. In some ways, it recalls the techniques used by Claude Lanzmann in his seminal film *Shoah*, when he was interviewing a Nazi officer. Hassan is not interested in the technicalities of the operation, of course, but rather in the mindset of the occupier, as he said in an interview with *Time Magazine Europe*: “I wanted to show how his [the soldier’s] nature becomes bad, how evil is imposed”.²³² Tracing the occupier’s consciousness is expressed visually in this film by the lingering shots of the graffiti drawn by the soldiers – Stars of David, quotes from Israeli songs as well as the scattered IDF equipment and field rations left behind by the soldiers. Undermining the moral high ground of the Zionist narrative and its justification for the military operation in Jenin is made not merely by hearing the victims’ voice, but also, and perhaps more demonstrably, by reversing the gaze and directing it towards the occupier, mocking him and diminishing his image by means of controlling his representation.

Importantly, it is Hassan’s cultural and linguistic hybridity, his intimate knowledge of the occupier, and indeed his access to Yuval – through his student – that allows him to assume this subtly, subversive position from which to speak, a position he has innovatively deployed in his other films.

In *Jenin Jenin* the battle is not represented and the film includes no interviews with fighters, (in fact some have criticized the film for portraying the Palestinians only as victims). Yet, ultimately the film does convey the ethos of resistance. Two protagonists

²³² Rees, Matt (18.5. 2003) *Time Magazine Europe*.

stand out in *Jenin Jenin*: a Mute man, who leads the camera around the camp, pointing out, in sign language, the different sites of destruction, and a 12 year-old girl, who with mature eloquence and a determined gaze talks about fighting back. The contradiction between the two bears out the core message of the film. Looking straight into the camera the young girl says:

My heart is tough when I fight my enemy? No. I defend my homeland and my camp. If you were robbed of your son would you not try and get him back? So do we. This is our land; this is our son; our mother; all that we have. Our women are not all gone yet. We will have more children and these children will be stronger and braver than the ones that are gone.

The girl is expressing what the mute cannot express. The mute is used symbolically to represent the silenced Palestinian narrative, and the young girl the redemption embodied by the younger generation.



The girl in *Jenin, Jenin*

Mer-Hamis's film depicts the armed resistance in rare footage of the troops in action. Yet, if *Jenin, Jenin* and *Invasion* glorified the armed resistance, *Arna's Children*

problematizes it by also depicting the complex interplay between national narratives and individual stories and between collective demands and private aspirations. The intimate time we spend with the protagonists exposes us to the tensions at play between the demand to assume a united collective identity and the private everyday life of ordinary individuals, resurfacing time and again as the harsh conditions of living under occupation continue to escalate.

In the first part of the film this tension is revealed in an archive scene from the first Intifada, in which an Israeli television crew interviews the children about the work of the theatre. The children talk about their personal enjoyment of the theatre, but the Israeli reporter probes them to discuss the theatre's contribution to the "Palestinian revolution". Towards the end of an interview with Ashraf, the Israeli reporter asks: "what is your dream for the future?" Before Ashraf can reply the reporter addresses Mer Hamis (who acts as mediator and translator) in Hebrew and says (off screen):

"Tell him to say that he wants to be the Palestinian Romeo ". "He doesn't know what Romeo means" replies Mer-Hamis. "It doesn't matter. Just make him say that. We can have ten takes if necessary, I just want him to say that". "Say that you want to be the Palestinian Romeo" whispers Mer Hamis to Ashraf, and Ashraf says: "I want to be a Palestinian Romeo. I understand you mean Romeo and Juliet but I don't understand what you mean by that...". The reporter insists "just say that again without the 'I don't understand' bit", he asks, and Ashraf complies.

Several years later, in the second part of the film, as the realities of the conflict are ever more violent, the collective demand to align oneself with the national cause becomes increasingly acute. Some of the film's protagonists joined the armed resistance, like Ala who led some of the troops to battle in 2002, or Yussuf who carried out a suicide attack in Israel. Others, like Mahmood, who disagrees with the armed struggle, are faced with constant pressures to join in and become martyrs. The film exposes these internal debates and the pressures at work in several scenes. In one scene, Mer-Hamis spends the night with a group of the *Al-Aksa Troops* led by Ala. As the group discusses the plans for their next attack a heated argument about the justification for the fight breaks out. In

it, ideological positions are intertwined with performances of masculinity to assert collective (national) selves.

Equally revealing is a scene where Mer-Hamis talks with Ala about his own convictions. Ala, whom we saw mourning his demolished home as a child in the first part of the film, no longer speaks of his life *personally*. Faced with the possibility that his family house will be demolished again, if he will not give himself up, he no longer refers to it as a private matter. Probed by Mer-Hamis to talk about it he says: "Let them ruin it again...my parents will have another home. Or would live in a tent". "Don't you pity your parents?" Mer-Hamis asks and Ala replies, repositioning himself within the collective: "Shouldn't we feel pity for the 300 homes that were demolished in one week".

The social dynamics depicted in the film resonate with recent ethnographic research into national identity formation in the PA during the time of the two *Intifadas*. For example, Julie Peteet (2000) argued that the infliction of violence by the Israeli army on the Palestinian population acquired, in the Palestinian discourse of resistance, an oppositional meaning. While for Israeli soldiers this is "an index of a fictionalized fear and image of inferiority of the subjected population", for the Palestinians the violence inflicted on them becomes "constitutive of a resistant subjectivity that signals heroism, manhood and access to leadership" (120). These are assigned the status of a rite of passage into manhood and a reversal of the social order, leading to political agency and empowerment (*ibid.*).

Similarly, Linda Pitcher (1998) has argued that Palestinian *Shabab* "for whom the context of life has become untenable...create for themselves 'another scene' in the contemplation and endeavor of death. Through the ritual of shahada [martyrdom], these youth speak. They enact a performance that enables a voice to escape the confines of military occupation" (9). According to Abu-Hahshhash (2006), under the conditions of the *Al-Aksa Intifada*, martyrdom is part of the everyday life of Palestine, and representations of it are dominant in Palestinian culture. These representations, claims Abu-Hahshhash, "evoke both sacred and secular meanings. The secular sense suggests

'heroism' as one of its indispensable conceptual connections, while the sacred is open to the absolute and the infinite. Both these senses imply the idea of sacrifice either 'in the way of Allah' or with reference to the homeland" (391).

Alongside the dynamics in operation between the men, the film also explores mother-son relationships, within a national discourse that demands the sacrifice of the private to the collective. In his quest to find the children of the theatre Mer-Hamis spends much time with their mothers, latently mirroring his attempt to make sense of his relationship with his own mother, Arna. The bereaved mothers in the film mourn and grieve but they also articulate the national demand for sacrifice.

In one scene Mer-Hamis probes Mahmood to talk about Yousef's suicide attack in Hedera. Mahmood, Yousef's best friend, evasively fidgets and mumbles, but his mother soon interrupts and says: "tell him that you have no friends left". Then, staring at the camera, she says to Mer-Hamis: "You have to film this. All his friends are gone and he is the last to stay...wouldn't it have been better if he was killed as well? wouldn't it? of course it is. Because he will then be like everyone else, and a disaster, if it happens to everyone, is not a disaster". Similarly, Ala's mother insists that he would not surrender, knowing well that he might be killed. Surrendering to the IDF would mean that she would have to pay the heavy price of humiliation. At some point in the film before Ala's death, she says to Mer-Hamis forcefully: "Even if they kill him I will not ask him to surrender... because I don't want to deal with the humiliation".

In the Palestinian discourse of national struggle; as Carol Bardenstein (1997) suggests, "Palestinian motherhood has been articulated, by mothers and others, as a mode of resistance" (169). While bearing sons traditionally granted women supremacy and social status even in pre-48 Palestinian society (as mothers provided manpower to work the land), "the eminently traditional act of bearing children, when appropriated into the discourse of Palestinian resistance, is redefined and 'radicalized' as an act of furnishing weapons and providing soldiers for the 'war effort' (ibid.: 173). Importantly, in the course of this appropriation, the mother-son relationship is displaced from the

private, domestic domain to the public. Thus, as Bardenstein puts it, “all mothers become the mothers of all sons. In spite of their displacement as ‘individual’ mothers, particular mothers... are to take comfort in the fact that the “collective” mother is taking care of a ‘collective’ son” (ibid.: 178). Socially, the highest status is granted to Umm-el-Shahid, the bereaved mother who lost her son to the national cause. Here, also, the sense of loss, the grief of a dead child, much as any other motherly act is ‘collectivized’.

The tendency to articulate motherhood as a mode of resistance governs the statement of the young girl in *Jenin, Jenin*, quoted above. It is also a characteristic of the Israeli national discourse, in which the ‘collective self’ takes prominence over the individual one. In *Arna’s Children*, the collective mourning, like the collective motherhood, is explicitly expressed by the Palestinian mothers but as I already suggested, the film’s ‘work of mourning’ is doubled. It is not only the mothers of the theatre’s children that embrace the ‘collectivity’ of the struggle in order to deal with the unexpressed personal mourning, but also Mer-Hamis, the filmmaker, whose personal mourning for his mother is tied up with, and perhaps can only be expressed through, the collective and the public domain. After all, while Mer Hamis initially intended to tell a personal story exploring his relationship with his mother, he eventually could only tell the story of his mother wrapped up in the collective.²³³

Conclusion

The three films about the battle of Jenin make an interesting case study of Palestinian cinema in Israel. Unlike the films I have discussed in earlier chapters, these films have triggered great controversy inside Israel. Within the Israeli public discourse the

²³³ E’ias Natur’s short documentary *Lama Zafuk* (2001), which was made in reaction to the October 2000 events, deals with the intersection between personal and collective mourning. The film is a compilation of short interviews with the bereaved mothers of the 13 youths killed by the police. The film, which was low-budget and self-funded, has been screened only at several public ceremonies of commemoration of the events, held by the Palestinian community in Israel (Ei’as Natur, interview, 27.6.2005). According to Natur, who comes from the Druze village of Daliat el-Carmel, the film was an attempt to question and scrutinise collective mourning.

directors' very belonging to the Israeli state and collective was questioned as a result of their criticism of Israel's conduct during the Intifada.

While their function as forms of counter-narrative, recounting the events in Jenin from a Palestinian point of view, invites a reading of these films solely on the indexical level and only in relation to the Israeli narrative, I suggest another reading which illuminates their correspondence with the Palestinian national narrative. In these films, the Palestinian-Israeli directors negotiated notions of resistance by reworking the political strategies of Palestinian citizens of Israel within the Palestinian national collective.

Seen against a background in which the resistance of the Palestinians inside Israel was predominantly articulated in terms of steadfastness (*Summud*), and in the context of the many films which either did not deal with the armed struggle or emphasised other forms of resistance (such as the *Summud*), these films mark a shift. If we consider these films in relation to films such as *Wedding in the Galilee*, where the ambiguous ending could be taken to predict the first *Intifada*, or *Divine Intervention*, where armed resistance is imagined as in a form of fantasy, then these films can be seen to go a step further. The pre-filmic event, in which the filmmakers decided to 'step into' the reality of the conflict in the West Bank, where performances of violence reaffirm national identities and political agency, is an important political and symbolic assertion. The films' construction of the events in Jenin as stories not only of victimhood but of heroism is suggestive perhaps of the wider shifts within the Palestinian community in Israel, where affinity with the *Intifada* is openly vocalized.

Furthermore, the films themselves were 'sites' through which the directors asserted political agency in ways that resonate with Palestinian resistance in the PA. They spent time with the fighters in Jenin under curfew, and importantly, crossed the Green Line with the aid of locals, taking part in the innovative detours around the Israeli road blockades and movement prohibitions. By so doing they aligned themselves with the day-to-day resistance to the occupation practiced by Palestinians in the PA. Evoking the Nakba, a prominent characteristic of Palestinian cinema, as I have already discussed at some length, ties the experiences in Jenin in 2002 to a perpetual Palestinian experience

that unites the Palestinian collective regardless of their contemporary diverse circumstances.

Yet, inasmuch as these films draw links, which reconstitute the Palestinian national collective, they also mark the difference between the diverse experiences of Palestinians in Israel and in the PA. The very act of crossing the Green Line reminds us of these differences, of the freedom of movement that is allowed to Palestinian citizens of Israel but not to Palestinians in the PA. Evoking the past - either the Nakba or the first Intifada - in relation to the events in Jenin, also evokes the divisions over the forms of resistance: staying or leaving, armed resistance or steadfastness. Finally, the point of view of all three films is that of the directors as outsider-insiders, and their subjectivities are inscribed into the films. In *Jenin, Jenin* the camera follows Bakri in the camp. While there is no narration, and hardly any dialogue between Bakri and the protagonists is heard, it is Bakri's body, which takes us in, out and through the camp. In *Invasion* Hassan is present on and off camera, and his dialogue with the protagonists is central to the film's meanings. The different ways in which Hassan positions himself within the film in relation to the Israeli soldier *and* to the Palestinian fighter perhaps goes to the core of the film's message. In *Arna's Children* Mer-Hamis is himself a protagonist; his narration is subjective and the subject matter of the film is autobiographical. It is Mer-Hamis's hybrid subjectivity (Palestinian and Jew), as well as that of his mother, through which we engage with Jenin and which intrinsically problematises mythical notions of national unity and keeps everything that the film reveals on the level of situated experiences.

Conclusion

In 2004, when I embarked on the research for this thesis, I was looking to write about grassroots filmmaking in Israel. I was interested in what seemed to be emerging pockets of filmmaking by minorities, which contested the hegemonic Zionist-Ashkenazi discourse that governs much of the Israeli media and film industries. Amongst other examples,²³⁴ were recent films by Palestinian citizens and a growing interest in film production amongst Palestinian youth. While this revival of filmmaking by young Palestinians captured my attention, it became an elusive object of research from the outset. Attempting to theorize this filmmaking posed challenges of coherence and consistency. On the one hand, these films were undeniably part of the growing body of Palestinian cinema, which in itself eludes clear boundaries and definitions. On the other hand, having been produced within Israel, and by citizens of the country, these films could also be thought about as forming part of Israeli cinema. This theoretical problem, I soon came to realise, was intrinsic to the very nature of Palestinian films that are produced in Israel. Tensions of 'belonging' underlie this filmmaking on various levels: it is manifested in the production processes, distribution and exhibition of the films, as well as being a thematic concern of many of the films.

Palestinian filmmakers in Israel oscillate between different strategies of political action and film production, as well as between different identity positions. Filmmakers who work inside Israel adopt an 'interstitial' mode of production by utilizing the contradictions embedded in the Israeli discourse and in the policies of cinema production. Yet, their relationship with the Israeli industry, and with the Israeli public sphere, is not always purely instrumental. Some of the filmmakers intentionally set out to make interventions within the Israeli public sphere, addressing the Palestinian community in Israel and the Israeli public at large. The films of Ibtisam Mara'ana, Rokaya Sabbah, Suha Arraf, Scandar Copti, Mohammad Bakri, Shady Srur and others

²³⁴ Other examples are films in Russian by and for the large community of Russian newcomers and filmmaking by and for the Orthodox Jewish community. These contest the Zionist-Ashkenazi hegemony albeit in different ways.

were made with those intentions in mind. Film schools such as the Arab Palestinian Film School in Nazareth and the Almanar College, as well other media-related Palestinian NGOs, work towards greater inclusion of the Palestinian citizens in the Israeli public sphere. The effects of such films and institutions on the Israeli discourse are debatable, and in any case uneven and always shifting. However, in general, I found that when films touched on the national conflict and were associated with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza they triggered controversy (as in the case of *Jenin, Jenin*), while films that dealt with aspects of Israeli colonialism inside Israel (deemed as 'social' issues), with the events of 1948 or with issues of gender within the Palestinian community, were largely overlooked and have attracted little public debate. In some cases, tensions of 'belonging' have stirred controversies when the identity position of the filmmaker and the context of production have clashed in the public's eye, as in the case of *Thirst* and *Ajami*, where the films' participation in international festivals as Israeli entries was thrown into question by the filmmakers' proclamation that the films are Palestinians and are not meant to represent Israel. Other filmmakers have in recent years adopted political and production strategies that have disconnected (and disassociated) them from the Israeli public sphere. Filmmakers such as Suleiman, Aljafari, Tabari and Hassan once worked inside the Israeli film and media industries and recently moved away from Israeli funding, and at times also from Israel.

Regardless of the filmmakers' strategies of production, the films discussed in this thesis share a common thematic concern: the Palestinian experience within Israel. While some of the films I discussed were produced inside Israel, with Israeli funding, and others were produced outside, the question of funding did not effect in most cases the films concerns and standpoints. They depicted, reflected on, and challenged the particular circumstances of Palestinians in Israel in the past and in the present. They recounted counter-narratives of the 1948 war; depicted life under the military government; reflected on, and challenged, the silence of the first generation, the strategy of the *Sumud* and a political culture of fear. They depicted the processes of 'creative destruction': the erasure of Palestinians from the landscape and the marginalisation of the contemporary Palestinian space within Israel. They engaged with the effects of

modernisation on the Palestinian community and they challenged gender relations and Orientalist and neo-Orientalist Zionist tropes. With regard to all these issues they brought forms of 'denied knowledge', to use Bhabha's term, into the public awareness in Israel and elsewhere, which have challenged and subverted the Zionist discourse of Euro-modernity.

In their cinematic treatment of the Palestinian experience in Israel most films have not simply constructed an alternative Palestinian story, which stands in opposition to Zionism. They often functioned as 'sites' through which conflicting discourses of identity, culture and politics could be and were negotiated. In the films, and through the process of making the films, the filmmakers examined, scrutinized and often positioned themselves in relation to dominant Palestinian and Israeli/Zionist discourses, within the wider cultural trajectories of East and West.

Questions of belonging were central to many of the films. Films that recounted the historical narrative and the events of the *Nakba*, such as *Legend*, *Keys*, *1948* and *In the Ninth Month*, often marked belonging to a Palestinian national collective through the process of remembering, recounting the historical narrative and 'finding the roots'. These films, as well as films that dealt with the *Al Aksa Intifada* (*Jenin*, *Jenin* and *Invasion*), explored the place of the Palestinian in Israel within the Palestinian collective by drawing links between Palestinians in Israel, in exile and in the PA, and by juxtaposing different forms of resistance: armed struggle vs. the *Sumud*.

Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, *Divine Intervention* and *The Time that Remains* investigate subject positions and political strategies, constructing Israel and the PA as oppositional spaces, while the filmmaker/subject 'belongs' nowhere. In *Ajami* Jaffa is constructed as 'a city of strangers', as a space to which everyone and no one belongs. Hamama, *Al-Jiser*'s main protagonist, at once belongs and does not belong to the village, and the village itself is isolated within the Israeli/Palestinian space. In many of the recent films by younger filmmakers - *Paradise Lost*, *Private Investigation*, *On Hold*, *Sense of Need*, *Ashes* and *Be Quiet* - searching for a place of belonging is the core of the films, as filmmakers/protagonists move within the spatiotemporal conjunctions of

Israel/Palestine. These films depict the very process of becoming, of searching for identity positions and a sense of belonging, leaving these questions open-ended in most cases, whereby no clear identity or place of belonging are proclaimed. Time and space in the films of the younger filmmakers were not governed by the perpetual repetition of the *Nakba*, which has characterised many Palestinian films. In contrast, these films focused on the 'here and now' and marked future orientations of change, led often by the agency of the young filmmakers/protagonists. In so doing, they reflect recent dynamics within the Palestinian community in Israel.

From the unique point of view of an insider-outsider, equipped with the intimate knowledge of cultural hybridity, which is often produced in colonial situations, these films negotiate with the Israeli space, culture and Jewish population of Israel. In many of these films the Jewish-Israelis, and Israel, are not merely embodied in images of soldiers. *Cut* explores the Arab-Jewish space of Agur, which was established on the ruins of the Arab-Palestinian village Ajur. The counter-narrative of the 1948 war is told, in *1948*, by Palestinians as well as by Israeli-Jews. In *Legend*, Salim is revealed to us also through the reflections of his Jewish-Zionist friends. In *Invasion*, a depiction of the heroic Palestinian armed resistance is intertwined with an intimate investigation of an Israeli soldier, in Hebrew. Mara'ana's films relate to Tel-Aviv as the epitome of Western modernity, as well as to like-minded Israeli-Jewish friends. In *On Hold* the protagonists' search for a place they can call home also examines, Israeli 'places'. *Ajami* includes amongst its multiple narratives the story of an Israeli policeman. In *Sense of Need* Srur creates imaginative transgressions of identity in which Joseph is Jewish, and Joseph's cultural and linguistic hybridity enables him to disarm the Israeli soldiers. In *Port of Memory*, Aljafari subverts Israeli popular culture and its depiction of Jaffa. *Arna's Children's* unique point of view is constituted by the director's mixed identity. Intertwining the story of Arna, the Jew, with that of the Palestinian children in Jenin the film challenges the politics of identity and reminds us that the struggle against oppression can transcend national entities.

In some of these films Palestinian identity, space and historical narrative are constructed in opposition to the Israeli-Jew and the Israeli space, as in *Invasion* or *Ashes* for example. In other films, while the effects of Israeli colonialism are charted, third spaces are constructed opening up alternatives of Jewish/Arab cohabitation of space, even if momentary and/or imaginary, and drawing attention to the ambivalence at the heart of the Zionist discourse. Such alternatives are suggested in the multiple perspectives of *Ajami*; in the imaginary link between Salim and Casablan in *Port of Memory*; in Mara'ana's relationship with her Tel-Avivian friends in *Paradise Lost*; in Haifa as it is portrayed in *On Hold*; in Joseph's transgression of the national conflict in *Sense of Need*; in the intrinsic hybridity of *Arna's Children* and in the nursery children depicted in *Private Investigation*, who confidently recount the history of the *Nakba* at the same time as singing popular Israeli songs in Hebrew.

Thus, viewed together, the films examined in this thesis complicate clear theoretical distinctions between hybridity and essentialism. They do not fall exclusively into any of the categories but operate on the intersection of national and postcolonial discourses. Similarly, explorations of identity through space or history, with which many of the films engaged, cannot easily be explained within the binary opposition of Israeli vs. Palestinian national cultures. While many of these films, but not all, dealt with the national, they were not governed by a national perspective; their challenge to Zionism moved beyond aspects of national cultures to the wider trajectory of East and West and the power relation between them. If anything can be said about them conclusively, it is that they suggest opposing trends within the Palestinian community in Israel and expose contradictions and ambiguity at the intersection of national and transnational discourses, of a colonial (condition) and postcolonial (discourse).

The question of 'belonging', which underlies these films' production, problematises the categories of both Israeli and Palestinian cinema, by drawing attention to the hybrid reality of both Israelis and Palestinians. Their production within Israel has destabilised the definition of Israeli cinema as national cinema, has thrown into question policies of multi-culturalism and neo-liberal discourses, and raised to the surface the internal

contradiction of the Zionist state. In so doing, these filmmakers have participated, alongside and in collaboration with Israeli-Jews, in the wider cultural and political opposition to Zionism that exists on the fringes of the Israeli public debate, and which from time to time manages to push the boundaries of the Zionist discourse.

In relation to Palestinian cinema, the films discussed in this thesis form part of what has often been termed New Palestinian Cinema and share many of the characteristics of recent Palestinian films that are produced in the PA or in exile. Their individualistic impulse, their focus on the present, their subjective perspectives and 'small' stories, which are often related to the life experience of the directors, as well as some of their critical engagement with the Palestinian national discourse, are by no means unique to films that are made by Palestinians in Israel. However, as with Israeli cinema, cases of films that were produced within Israel, and/or of films which did not deal with the national struggle or in cases where films problematised Palestinian nationality not only by showing the heterogeneity of Palestinians but by drawing connections with the Israeli-Jew, complicate even further the continuously shifting and fluid boundaries of Palestinian cinema as a national project.

Moreover, if, as some scholars have observed, the escalation of the conflict in recent years pushed Palestinian cinema at large towards greater concentration on the national struggle, the production of a unified nationality, and strategies of production which favour separation from (if not boycotting of) Israel (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008; Alexander, 2005; Dickinson, 2005, 2010), the films discussed in this thesis, especially of young Palestinians in Israel, *also* demonstrate opposite trends, which expose the heterogeneity of Palestinians, a refusal to construct Israel as oppositional to Palestine and complicate national discourses and historical narratives. These films unfold a complex relationship between the category of the 'national' and the category of the 'cultural'.

As this thesis has examined a spatiotemporal section of Palestinian cinema, and its conclusions are therefore bounded by the timeframe of the research and limited to its spatial focus. As with any research that deals with contemporary cultural production,

my conclusions elude the benefits of historical perspectives, especially when one considers the ever-changing dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The most recent developments under the current right wing government inside Israel, which included acts of aggression towards Gaza and Lebanon, as well as official policies and expressions of exclusion towards the Palestinian citizens of Israel, may well lead Palestinian filmmaking in Israel in different directions.

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Adawi, Safa (2003) *Tur'an*
Aljafari Kamal (2006) *The Roof /Al Sateh*
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Arraf, Suha (2004) *Good Morning Jerusalem*
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Bakri, Mohammad (1998) *1948*
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Hassan, Nizar (1998) *Legend/Ostura*
Hassan Nizar, (1999) *Yasmin*
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Hassan, Nizar (2003) *Invasion/Ijtiyah,*
Idris, Khaled (2001) *Red and Blue/Khumar wa'Zurak*
Kazmouz, Ramez (2007) *Nazek*
Mara'ana, Ibtisam (2001) *Paradise Lost /Al-fardus al-mafqud*
Mara'ana, Ibtisam (2005) *Badal*
Mara'ana, Ibtisam (2005) *Al Jiser*
Mara'ana, Ibtisam (2007) *Three Times Divorced/ Talaq Ba'ltlat*
Mara'ana, Ibtisam (2008) *Lady Kul-el Arab*
Mer-Hamis, Juliano (2003) *Arna's Children/Awlad Arna*
Nassar Ali (1997) *The Milky Way/Darbo-t-Tabbanat*
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Natur, E'ias (2001) *Lama Zafuk*
Sabbah, Rokaya (2007) *On Hold*
Suleiman, Elia (1995) *Chronicle of a Disappearance/ Waka'eo Siljill Ikhtifa*
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Srur, Shady (2003) *A Sense of Need/Hassa al-Haja*
Tabari, Ula (2003) *Private Investigation/Khaliqna wa-Aliqna*
Tannus, Basel (2006) *Arus el-Jalil*
Zoabi, Sameh *Be Quiet* (2005)

Appendix 1

List of interviews

Palestinian filmmakers

Abu Wael Tawifk: Tel Aviv, 7.4.2005

Adawi Safa: Tur'an, 6.9.2004

Arraf Suha: Haifa, 13.4.2005

Arbid Joni: Jerusalem, 13.7.2007

Bakri Mohammad: Tel Aviv, 13.9.2004; Haifa, 19.8.2005

Barakat Anan: Nazareth, 23.5.2005; 22.7.2007

Copti Scandar: Jaffa 16.8.2005; 26.3.2008

Dau Salim: Haifa 31.3.2005

Essa Rima: Jerusalem, 31.7.2005

Kazmouz Ramez: Nazareth, 22.7.07

Idris Khaled: Tamra, 13.4.2005

Mara'ana Ibtisam: Haifa, 6.9.2004; Rishpon 26.7.2005

Mer- Hamis Juliano: London, April 2006.

Nassar Ali: Tzlil Ha'horesh, Galilee 1.7.2005

Natur E'ias: Daliat el-Carmel, 27.6. 2005

Sabbah Rokaya: Nazareth, 22.7.07

Salti Ihab: Tel Aviv, 26.6.2005

Sha'aban Kasam: Beit Hagefen, Haifa, 27.7.2005.

Shreidi Nazim: telephone interview, 25.8.2005

Srur Shady: Nazareth, 30.7.2005

Tabari Ula: Paris 26.2.2006

Tannous Basel: Ma'alot-Tarshiha 4.5.2005

Yousef Bilal: Daburia, 30.7.2005

Zoabi Sameh: Nazareth, 19.7.2005

Functionaries within the Israeli Film and television Industries

Ben-Shoshan Yifat (head of Production and Funding Department SBA) Jerusalem, 15.8.2005

Cohen Eti (Managing director, Cinema Council) Tel Aviv, 21.6.2005

Eini Giora (Director, the Rabinowitz Foundation) Tel Aviv, 5.6.2005

Fisher David (Director, The New Foundation of Cinema and Television), Tel Aviv, 10.4.2005

Ganani Gideon (Director, Makor Foundation) Tel Aviv 21.6.2005

Leon Udi (Head of Prioritized Programmes and Cultural Diversity in *Keshet* (one of channel 2 franchise holders), founder and former director of the Gesher Cinema Fund) Tel Aviv, 10.4.2005

Lanzberg Itai (Head of Factual Programmes, Israel Broadcast Authority) Shoham 9.4.2005

Lipkin David (Finance Director of the Israeli Film Fund) Tel-Aviv, 10.4.2005; 1.8.2005

Mulla Yossi (Head of programmes Second Broadcast Authority (SBA)) Tel Aviv, 15.7.2005

Nave Ziv (Director, The Gesher Cinema Fund) Tel Aviv, 26.6.2005

Other Media/film professionals

Abu Baker Gazi (television journalist) Jerusalem, 31.7.2005

Bahalul Zohir (Established television director and presenter), Acre, 2.8.2005

Brancy Donia and Mohammad Mansour (Directors of the Almanar College). Taibe, 24.3.2005.

Farah Jafar (Director Mussawa, NGO) Tel Aviv 5.5.2005; Haifa, 7.7.2005

Gal Irit (former IBA producer, currently independent producer) Jerusalem, 4.4.2005

Hadad Suhel (Actor and television presenter) Tel Aviv 21.5.2005.

Halabi Rafik (Established television director and presenter), Haifa, 7.5.2005

Kashua Sayed (Writer and Journalist) Jerusalem, 13.7.2006

Khlikal Ala (Journalist, script-writer) Haifa, 7.7.2005

Mugrabi Avi (filmmaker, director of the Israeli Documentary Forum and activist) Tel Aviv 29.3.2005

Natur Salman (Journalist, the founder of the Al Jadid Cinema Group) Daliat el-Carmel, 27.6 2005

Rinawi Khalil (Media Academic and Board member the Cinema Council) Haifa, 7.7.2005

Sivan Eyal (Filmmaker and Independent producer/distributor) London, 3.2.2007

Tavor Roge (Former head of the IBA Arabic division) Kfar Vradim, 12.7.2005

Trabelsi Osnat (Independent producer) Tel Aviv 31.3.2005

Yunous Nizar (Independent Producer) Nazareth, 22.7.2007

Zuabi Hanin (Director I'lam, NGO) Nazareth 11.8.2005; 15.4.2004